

#244

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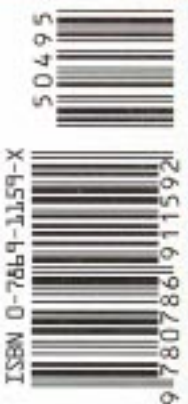
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Ed Greenwood
Interview

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Wings

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Michael Lambert

Learn the tactics of fighting airborne opponents, and add four new flying races to your AD&D® campaign, either as opponents or allies for your PCs.



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Roger Raupp

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Michaelene Pendleton

What wager is worth more than a witch's entire fortune?

About the Cover

Roger Raupp painted this view of the Xakhun airships for *DRAGON® Magazine* years ago. Recently, we discovered the painting, the drawings, and the sketches in the labyrinthine department archives. Unearthed at last, "Xakhun Airship" forms the center of our "Wings" theme.

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Volume XXII, No. 7
February 1998

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The Best Campaign

THE LETTERS continue to arrive, but the first responses to the "Playing Favorites" editorial in issue #241 are confirming what I hoped was true: Even those who have a clearly favorite campaign also enjoy other settings. I'm not alone!

Much has changed since I wrote that editorial about a year ago. Aside from the obvious changes in company ownership and the location of our offices, we've also seen TSR Online move to the web (at www.tsrinc.com), where it has established both a chat area and a message board in addition to the features it had originally. Thus, the topics that inspired that editorial are now at the new location. Visit us there sometime, and add your opinion to the discussions.

I promised to name my favorite setting once the responses arrived, and it's tempting to equivocate and name a half-dozen. That would be more fair and truthful in many ways, but it would also be a cop-out. Also, since I wrote that editorial, my first choice has wavered several times, making it all the more tempting to be a weenie and not pick just one. But you held up your end of the bargain, so I can't back down now.

My favorite is the AL-QADIM® setting. Now, I've never run an AL-QADIM player character, and I've DMed only a couple dozen sessions of *Arabian Adventures* (compared with hundreds in the Realms, Krynn, or Oerth), but the Land of Fate still knocks me out more than any other setting. Why?

The high production values of the products certainly had something to do with it (those gorgeous maps!), as did the superlative design and editing by Jeff Grubb and Andria Hayday. Most of the adventures for the setting were excellent (especially those by Wolfgang Baur and Steve Kurtz), focusing on the storytelling emphasis of Arabian tales without losing sight

of the strength of location-based encounters.

Another reason AL-QADIM stands out as my favorite is that it achieved a general appeal while maintaining an exotic atmosphere. All of my players instantly grasped that the Land of Fate was somewhere else, but they had no problem adjusting to the new customs of Zakhara. We had as much fun in conversations over coffee with the sheik after a salt ceremony as we did playing out combat with ghuls and djinn. Saying the right thing to the Grandfather of Assassins became just as thrilling as rolling a natural 20 in combat. And, face it, a mamluk is way cooler than a paladin.

That said, I must confess that I haven't run an AL-QADIM adventure for well over a year. In that time I've played in the FORGOTTEN REALMS®, RAVENLOFT®, BIRTHRIGHT®, and GREYHAWK® settings, some of my other favorites.

Also, I have a soft spot for some of the lesser-played campaigns, notably the historical supplements and the *Masque of the Red Death* products. (One of my game dreams is to run a time-traveling campaign that touches on all of them. Like most folks, I *imagine* many more campaigns than I'll ever actually run—especially the latest version of my house campaign ... which is, of course, my *next* favorite.

On that note, write me a short letter describing your own house campaign—whether you've actually run it or have just dreamed it so far. We'll print the most interesting in "D-Mail," where everyone can see what you've imagined.



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MANY OF YOUR YOUR LETTERS this month address Steve Stewart's note in issue #241. The second most popular topic was favorite game settings, in response to the editorial from the same issue. Keep sending us your opinions on that question, but also let us know what you think of this issue and what you'd like to see.

Humor vs. Hatred

Dear **DRAGON® Magazine**,

I completely disagree with Steven Stewart's opinion on Lawrence Wenzel's article on the mother NPC in issue #238. I believe Mr. Stewart missed the point. Being a woman and a gamer for nearly 10 years now, I think I have another valid viewpoint. The article was poking fun at the stereotype of mothers, not at mothers themselves. Humor can be an excellent weapon against prejudice and hatred. By going "over the top," as it were, the article—while being quite funny—also showed that these views

I believe the main reason that more women aren't interested in gaming is not because of articles like this but because of the *lack* of them. If this article weren't so silly, a lot of male players would simply keep believing the "fact" that women are good only for mothering the party ("Here, you can play the cleric.") or for being the chainmail bimbo ("Hey baby, wanna take a tumble with me?"). If the article seemed ridiculous, opinions like that should seem ridiculous, too.

Most games are based on vaguely Medieval cultures. Some gamers and writers like to accentuate the submissive position of Medieval women. Women don't want to play in games where they don't even have the imperfect rights that they have in this world. What gamers and writers need to have truly equal games is to realize that men and women aren't that different. Women don't adventure only for revenge, and men don't adventure

Humor can be an excellent weapon against prejudice and hatred.

of women were just stereotypes, not the real thing. Being politically correct allows one blindly to decry anything that doesn't appear to be agreeable to everyone. It doesn't allow you to see the subtleties and genuinely think about the cause of the stereotypes.

only for power. Each character should be an individual. Any kind of stereotypes, chainmail bimbo, the tedious elf/dwarf hatred, the man-hating Amazon, the obnoxious paladin (these last from David Liepmann's letter in issue #241), all harm the game. They

destroy original thought, and they bring in hate where none needs to be. There are enough villains in the world to fight; we don't need to fight among ourselves.

Andrea McCormick
Harrisburg, PA

No Offense

Dear **DRAGON Magazine**,

As an avid gamer and reader of *Dragon Magazine*, I don't write often enough congratulating you on how well you do. I'm always looking forward to the next magazine, and I'm never displeased.

In issue #241, Steve Stewart made some comments I wish to address. He seemed somewhat offended by what "Mommy Dearest" (in issue #238) seemed to say. He wrote "A close examination of the article reveals an underlying lack of respect for women in general." I disagree. If anything, it shows a hearty and fearful respect for what mothers seem to be able to do. He likened the image to that of the idyllic June Cleaver, but I don't remember Mrs. Cleaver berating Eddie Haskell, even at his most annoying, brown-nosing times.

Also, he states that "[the article] totally ignores the many valuable contributions women make in modern society." The first thing to remember is that the AD&D® world is very far from modern. Also, if we look at it historically, women usually were not considered equal and were the housekeepers and tenders. If this were not so, Joan of Arc would have had a much easier time. The AD&D setting, however, is a fantasy world for the most part, and women are viewed as equals, something I wholly applaud.

"Mommy Dearest" portrayed humorously that scary tendency mothers have to know what we do, where we are, and what we think even before we ourselves know. I do not think it was offensive, but as a son I might be biased. So I forced my own mother to read the article, and the only thing she said was, "That's right. And don't you forget it." It frightened me more than a little.

We must remember that AD&D is pretty much a free-style game, and the DM is free to use, ignore, or edit anything he (or she) wants. So, if "Mommy Dearest" does not meet your delicate standards, change it or throw it out. Personally, it would be something I

might hint on in roleplaying, but I would not insert any hard rules.

In conclusion, let's not try so hard to find something offensive or conflicting. It's a very sad thing that the world has lost its ability to laugh for fear of offending someone else. Anything, if you break it down into small enough pieces, can be offensive, but when you look at it as a whole, it shows a completely different picture.

Forrest Garwood
Clearbrook, VA

M.O.M Point by Point

Dear *DRAGON Magazine*,

I am writing in response to a letter from Steve Stewart about the "Mommy Dearest" article in *Dragon Magazine* #238. Personally, I found the article hilarious and surprisingly useful. I would like to go through the main points of Steve's letter one by one.

One: "[The article shows] an underlying lack of respect for women in general." I don't know about you, but these abilities, like Berate, Detect Lies, Hindsight, and Power Word: Middle Name make me think that Lawrence R. Wenzel had great respect for his mother. Also, note that the article is intended to create a particular kind of female character, one who not only probably has children but also has chosen to become a member of M.O.M. It isn't meant for female NPCs in general.

Two: "[The article] ignores the many valuable contributions women make in modern society." Yes, it does, that's true. It doesn't need to take them into account. A member of M.O.M. doesn't have to spend her entire time in the pursuit of motherly duties, no more than a fighter has to spend all his time fighting. (That'd tire you out quickly, wouldn't it?) After all, modern Mothers (and mine has some of those abilities, too) do all the child-rearing stuff, all the cleaning, the housework, and manage to also take college courses and keep a job. Nowhere did the article suggest that Mothers do nothing but housework. What the article does say is that cooking, cleaning, and child rearing are big jobs, and that Mothers can do them well.

Three: "The article also sends the message that 'motherly' chores are the exclusive province of women." I see what you mean . . . however, the article claims these chores and abilities to be the exclusive province of

Mothers (or at least claims that Mothers have perfected them), not of women in general. Keep in mind, women that become Mothers (with the capital M) have done so by choice. Granted, men cannot become Mothers, but I took the proficiencies in particular to be applicable to any PC or NPC who wished to take the time to learn them, male or female. Then again, that's only my interpretation.

Oh, and a final note: as far as females in the roleplaying scene go, my gaming group is an anomaly of sorts. We are all college students at an all-women school, so our groups are correspondingly made entirely of females. Most, if not all, of the characters are also female. One character recently became a mother, and she happens to be the scantily-clad barbarian of the group. All the other characters dress sensibly and wear armor that actually protects all of their vital organs. When I bought *Dragon Magazine* #238 and read it, I immediately distributed the "Mommy Dearest" article among my players, and all of them loved it.

Diana Wray
Staunton, VA

I'm a 58-year-old man who wants to grow down to be Drizzt Do'Urden.

Mothers and the Realms

Dear Dave,

In response to the editorial and the "D-Mail" column from issue #241: Bad news [for those who think of Realms fans as young teens]—I'm a 58-year-old man who wants to grow down to be Drizzt Do'Urden.

Favorite setting? After all the novels, it has to be the FORGOTTEN REALMS® campaign.

On the Mother NPC article: Being Jewish, I roared with laughter. Tell Steve Stewart to quit being politically correct and get a sense of humor. My sense of humor is second-hand, as I obtained it at my local Army-Navy store . . . from a bin marked "used war surplus."

Two issues (#241 and the Annual) at once—I might have a fit of the vapors!

Jeremy A. Michele
Billings, MT

The Living Oerth

Dear Dave,

Hello from one of those disgruntled 30-something GREYHAWK® gamers.

Two friends and I have been adventuring since 1982, starting with *The Caves of Chaos*. We have stuck to the GREYHAWK setting exclusively since the early 90s. My friends and I currently live one hour apart, and we can play only three or four weekends per year, but the sessions are quite intense, starting in the late morning and ending sometimes before dawn the next day.

We have been playing three Ratikan Highlanders for the past six years, and we've purchased every GREYHAWK product ever printed.

I really can't give an explanation why GREYHAWK has been our world of choice, but we love the game. We are overjoyed to hear that TSR will be breathing new life into the setting.

We exhausted the supply of published GREYHAWK adventures long ago and now simply create our own scenarios and throw in the occasional purchased adventure, which the DM alters to fit the GREYHAWK setting. *The Ruins of Myth Drannor* was awesome, and I am currently working on *The*

Night Below as well as *Dragon Mountain*. Customizing is a lot of work!

Connor McCleod
Littlestown, PA

Kallisto the Bleak

Dear Dave,

My favorite campaign setting has always been one of my own creation. All of the history, magic, and non-player characters are at my fingertips. My players and I have devised an exciting world named Kallisto the Bleak just this past August, and so far everyone is satisfied.

I have tried some of the published campaign settings in previous years, and of them I would have to say that the GREYHAWK and RAVENLOFT® settings are the ones I like best. Why?

When I first started playing, the only published game settings were

the *Empire of the Petal Throne* and the World of GREYHAWK. Since my fantastical leanings were more to the West than the mystical East, I chose the GREYHAWK campaign. Visions of elves, halflings, and dwarves still filled my mind. What I liked most about Oerth was that the shield devices of the various lands were printed right on the cover, allowing me to show the players just what Tenser's guardsmen were wearing on their shields. What I liked least about the world was the profusion of odd gods that didn't seem to have any connection to each other, or even to know of each other's existence.

Only recently have I started running games set in the new RAVENLOFT setting. (I bought the original module years ago but didn't see much scope to it.) The main reason I like it so much is its similarity to the atmosphere of *Call of Cthulhu*: I am still looking desperately for the *Masque of the Red Death* accessory so I can incorporate my *Cthulhu by Gaslight* rules with the AD&D game.

J.T. Fuqua II
Santa Fe, NM

Everyone's Favorite

Dear *DRAGON Magazine*,

While many will tell you only about their own preferences, I'm going to tell you about the entire group's (past and present) favorite campaigns.

Greg likes PLANESCAPE® setting most. He truly is an incomprehensible, cant-spewing power gamer.

Logan likes the DARK SUN® setting. It's hard to turn it down when your thri-kreen gets five attacks a round. Anjun likes DRAGONLANCE® most. Jon and Zeb just don't care.

What about me? I'll play anything, but I love the campaign I made myself.

Bill Palacek
14798 Flintlock Road
Henderson, NV 89014

Ready to Play

Dear *DRAGON® Magazine*,

I am fourteen, and I am sorry to say that I have never played the AD&D game. I am reading lots of the complete handbooks and other rules supplements. I discovered your magazine when I saw my cousin's huge pile of them, and now I take them out from the local library.

I really like "Bazaar of the Bizarre" and "Arcane Lore," and before issue #237, I had never even heard of the

MYSTARA™ setting. "Knights of the Dinner Table" is the best of your comic strips.

The new kits you create look like they would be fun to play. Your new spells are really good. The "I'm a What?!" article was wonderful, a must for all DMs. Overall, issue #237 was my favorite of the ones I've read.

Virgil Linkewich
Regina, SK, Canada

Ecology Requests

Dear *DRAGON Magazine*,

As a long time fan of your magazine, I have to say that every issue since your return has been fantastic! I've been extremely impressed by the quality of the content. Though most all of the articles are quite entertaining, I find your "Ecology" section the most useful in actually creating and playing in my campaign. Having that background information on a beast makes all the difference in the world when, as a DM, you want to roleplay each NPC to the fullest rather than just doing the old "hack and slash."

I would like to suggest some creatures that I would very much like to see headlined in your "Ecology" section in a future issue (the mischievous kenku; shape-changing bandits, the spriggn; and the evil dwarves, the duergar).

Again I say, "a job well done!" I'll be renewing my subscription for sure.

Keith Coon
Tempe, AZ

Realms of Character

Dear *DRAGON® Magazine*,

I have been reading *Dragon Magazine* for a long time and have often considered writing a letter but never found the time or nerve. However, when I saw the subject of issue #241's "The Wyrms' Turn," I decided I should finally just go ahead and write a letter.

Both my wife and I play AD&D and are both in our mid-twenties. I have been playing AD&D for about fifteen years now, and my wife has just started in the last few years. We both agree on our favorite campaign, the FORGOTTEN REALMS setting. However, we both disagree with the emerging stereotypes that seem to have risen up around the fans of AD&D's major settings. I thoroughly enjoyed the DRAGONLANCE, RAVENLOFT®, and GREYHAWK settings, and I'm thrilled to see them all once again getting the attention

they deserve (from "Current Clack" column in the same issue, I understand that GREYHAWK is to receive renewed attention and, of course, there is the DRAGONLANCE line), but I always come back to the FORGOTTEN REALMS campaign. My wife, having just started gaming in the last couple years, hasn't had a lot of exposure to some of the now defunct or often ignored settings. However, she has had a lot of exposure to both the DRAGONLANCE and RAVENLOFT settings. Yet her favorite setting remains the Realms. Our main reasons for this preference are the well developed characters and "exotic locales" of the Realms. That is not to say that DRAGONLANCE and GREYHAWK don't have their share of enjoyable characters and locations; it's just that the Realms have our favorites (with the exception, of course, of the great and powerful Fizban).

Now, you're probably wondering what we base "our favorites" on. Many of the personalities of the Realms have a depth and history that few campaigns can boast, even their primary characters. (The DRAGONLANCE campaign has notable exceptions in the Heroes of the Lance.)

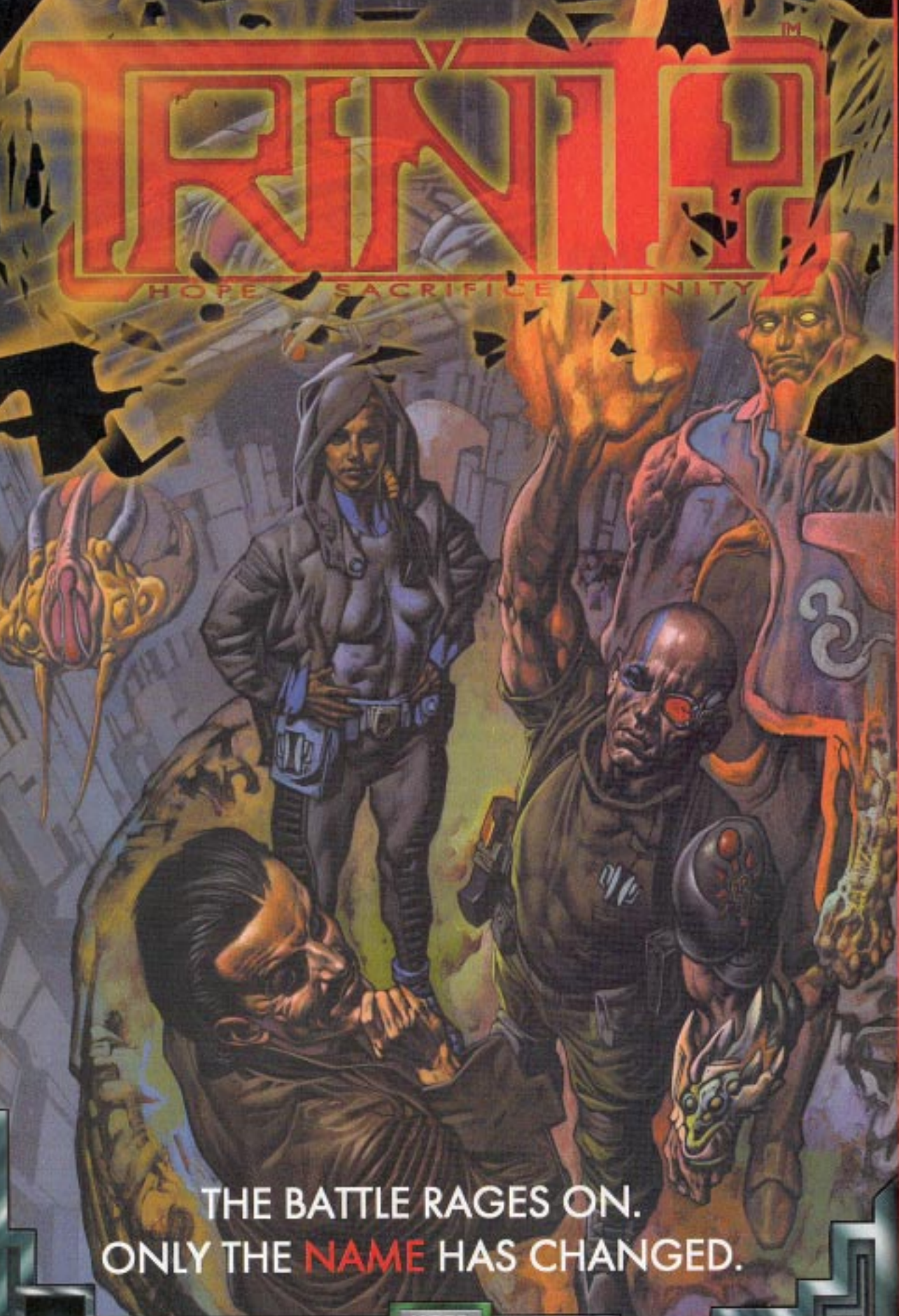
Also the world of the FORGOTTEN REALMS seems to be the most thoroughly explored and detailed of all the currently existing campaign worlds. There's a lot more I could say, but I'm not trying to write a thesis on fantasy characterization.

Chris and Amy Matosky
Address Withheld



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The Prepared DM

Following are some basic ideas that should aid the novice Dungeon Master in presenting a campaign while running the technical aspects of the game smoothly.

As inconsequential as it might seem at first, where the players sit relative to the DM has an effect on the success of the game session. I have found it most advantageous to have the players sit in a semi-circle, each facing the DM. A large round table is ideal for this, but a rectangle often results with the player's facing each other instead of the DM. In such a case, it might be better to find comfortable floor space, if circumstances permit.

the surrounding terrain, buildings, streets or the inside of a building or dungeon would be helpful. It saves a lot of paper as well.

2. NPC List. Each week, the DM should hand out a list of the NPCs that were encountered in the previous session. For those NPCs who were not important, don't list them—or do if you wish to throw your PCs off track. Include the NPC's name, race, basic description, and whatever facts are already known of the individual.

3. Player Character Summary. Treat this in the same way as above, and include a basic physical description. This sheet should not need frequent alteration.

4. Player Information on Nearby Territories. Whatever local news,

2. Employ theatrics. Stand up, or gesture more, or raise your voice a bit; get their attention. If the scene does not involve combat, then let them know it is important by catching their attention. Throwing eggs at them will also regain their attention, but that is not recommended. Use motion to your advantage. People pay more attention to moving objects than to stationary ones, so walk around a bit when you don't need to roll dice.

3. Declare the immediate passage of time. A common cause of story lag is simple: nothing is happening. Move the story past these moments quickly.

4. If the characters don't know what to do next, then provide immediate clues for direction, or simply state the choices.

5. In combat, don't let rules debates slow the action. There's always time to hone expertise in the rules later. Just never be wrong, OK? It might also help to list all NPCs and creatures on one or two sheets to make stats easily accessible. It's no good for the flow of the game if one has to search around for the details.

6. If all else fails, everyone should shut their books and watch a movie.

Follow the above advice, and things should begin to run pretty well.

Dan Cross
337 South Devon Ave
Wayne, PA, 19087

The number-one threat to a game is story lag.

The player characters (PCs) should each have something in common with at least two other PCs. Choose one or two from the guidelines below:

1. Ideology, common beliefs, common allegiance, or common patron.

3. Membership in a common network, organization, guild, or band.

4. Membership in the same family, preferably friends as well. Remember the assumption is that these people are working together-or will be-so don't make your commonality a disadvantage through mutual hatred.

5. Friendship. Easy enough.

Before the game begins, the DM might wish to consider using the following tools:

1. Dry-Erase Board. These are ideal in situations where a quick sketch of

geographic locations, or sites of interest that the party would have knowledge of should be detailed here. Player maps should be included, their detail in direct proportion to collective character knowledge (though I'm not suggesting that the maps reveal any information that a character has kept hidden).

The number-one threat to a game is story lag. If your players look bored or are reading a book, chances are the story is lagging. Some ways to avoid this are:

1. Having the PCs suddenly attacked. Do this too often, and the players will think either that they made you angry or that you never prepared. Or, just annihilate their characters for fun, but don't expect them ever to play again.

A Grave Injustice

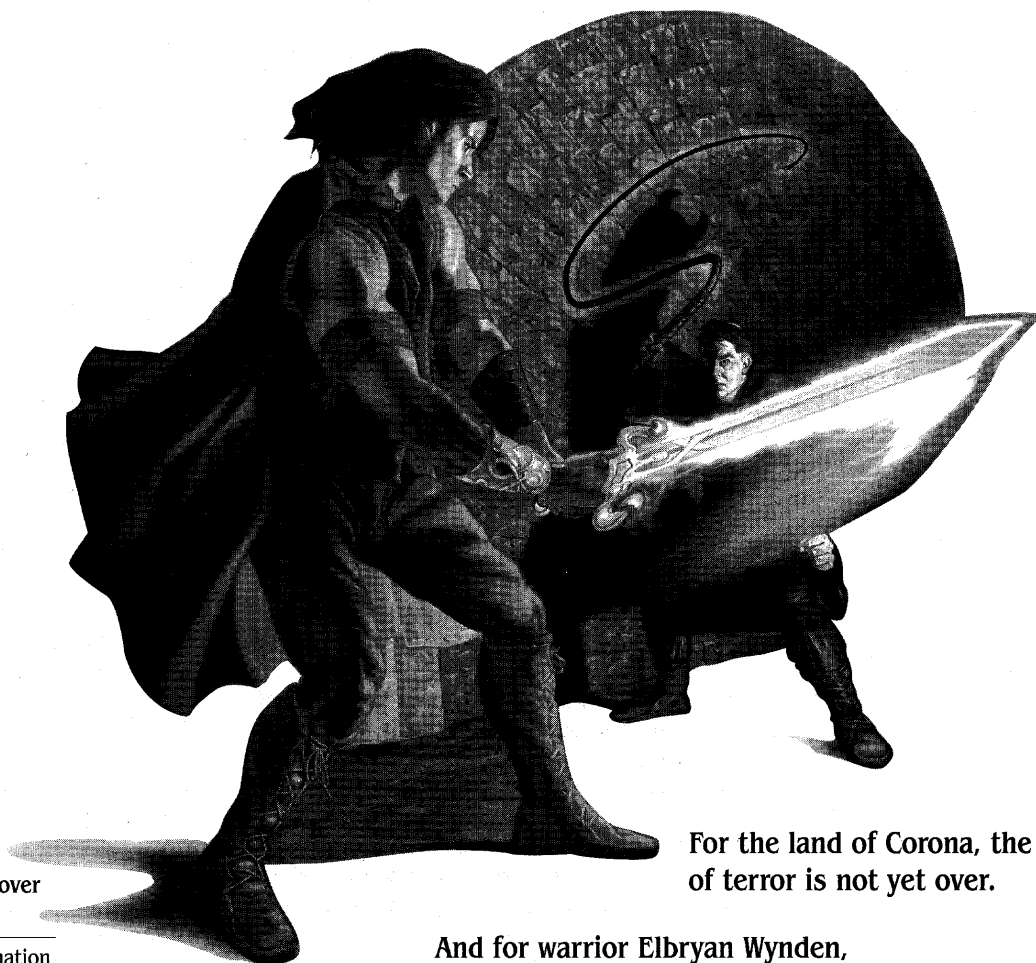
I am writing in response to the grave injustice TSR has perpetrated against one of the most interesting monsters in the AD&D® game. The death knight has been described in previous TSR texts as "a horrifying form of lich."

It is grossly unfair to fallen paladins everywhere to fail to accord them the true power of their undead stature. Thus, death knights are entitled to all the basic powers and immunities of liches as described on page 222 of the *MONSTROUS MANUAL™* book. These powers include fear in creatures of 5 HD or fewer, 1d10 hp cold damage by touch, +1 or better weapons to hit and immunity to *charm*, *sleep*, *enfeeblement*, *polymorph*, cold, electricity, insanity, or *death* spells. Death knights are not granted the power to paralyze by touch, since no death knight would be caught dead without his armor. (The armored gauntlets prevent this power from functioning.)

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Death knights, in life, worked hard to gain levels and should not be arbitrarily stripped of them upon becoming a death knight. Therefore, all death knights should retain the HP, THACO, AC, Saving Throws and magical items that they possessed in life. An examination of the foremost work on Death Knights to date, *Knight of the Black Rose*, by James Lowder, reveals

and then grant the death knight one of the additional powers for every two or three levels beyond. This allows the DM to create a truly fearsome opponent for medium- through high-level parties. There is also justification (but not as well supported in *Knight of the Black Rose* and the DRAGONLANCE novels) for death knights to have the following powers: immunity to fire (see the

Support equal opportunity undeath and give death knights the fearsome powers they deserve!

still more powers that death knights are entitled to. First of these powers is the *shadow walk* ability. Usable at will, this power allows the death knight to move from shadow to shadow in a fashion similar to dimension door, with the exception that the death knight may lurk insubstantially in the shadows as desired. Dematerialization and rematerialization take a full round. This power is used extensively by Lord Soth throughout the DRAGONLANCE® novels and in *Knight of the Black Rose*.

Lord Soth is *always* described as projecting an aura of cold. This aura coincides with the 5' radius *fear* aura death knights perpetually generate and has no real effect on game play. It does, however, provide further justification for the lich's cold touch.

Other powers used by Lord Soth in *Knight of the Black Rose* include *Bigby's clenched fist* 1/day (used to pound on Strahd's castle), *Bigby's crushing hand* 1/day (used on the hapless demonic tree when Soth is first swallowed by the mists), and either *Melf's minute meteors* or *meteor swarm* (as fits the campaign) 1/day (used when Soth tried to gain entry to Strahd's castle through a horde of Strahd's minions.) Also, one unidentifiable spell is used by Lord Soth to strike at Caradoc. I have used *Otiluke's freezing ray* 1/day for this effect.

Also, these additional powers allow for greater flexibility on the part of the DM. If one considers the MONSTROUS MANUAL description to be the minimum powers available to a death knight and Lord Soth to have the maximum, then the DM can assign all death knights of 9th level the standard powers from the MONSTROUS MANUAL (plus the lich power additions)

Vistani camp in *Knight of the Black Rose* and Lord Soth's death by fire), *gate* 2/day as a means of transportation, and power to control lesser undead (see Soth's entry into the Tower of High Sorcery.)

Support equal opportunity undeath, and give death knights the fearsome powers they deserve!

Harry Pratt
Normal, IL

The SAGA® Saga Continues

Christopher Manning, you're not alone. I purchased the FIFTH AGE™ boxed set, even though I was somewhat hesitant about the new card system. Being an avid fan of the DRAGONLANCE setting, I was most disappointed at the lack of information presented. One 96-page booklet does not paint the picture of the world that is Krynn. It cannot be assumed that everyone buying the FIFTH AGE boxed set has access to all the information presented in the *Tales of the Lance* boxed set, which I believe contains one of the best worldbooks written. As for the rules, I'm all for focusing on the story aspects of the game and extensive character development.

The game mechanics, however, left a lot to be desired. The idea of a classless system is the first step to an unbalanced game, in which one player can take control. To illustrate this point, a character (with a bit of luck) possessing Ability Codes of A in several abilities with moderate scores in each can become a magic-slinging, sword-swinging juggernaut, making other player feel like extras in a movie. After playing the module that came with the boxed set, the decision from the group

was unanimous: return to the trusty, good old AD&D® system, the game from which the DRAGONLANCE saga was born—the game in which everyone works as a team, utilizing the strengths of each character, whether or not he has three 18s, because each class possesses abilities that others don't.

Maybe the DRAGONLANCE setting needed a facelift, but not a total reconstruction. The AD&D system is one of the best roleplaying games around, and I for one will not be changing. The phrase "If it isn't broken, don't fix it" comes to mind.

Just one more question for all those DRAGONLANCE fans out there. Why is it that psionics do not exist on Krynn? *The Complete Psionics Handbook* states that no psionics are native to Krynn, and those that do appear are from other worlds or ancestors of such peoples. *Unsung Heroes*, on the other hand, states that no psionics exist on Krynn and that those who stay there longer than one month per level lose their powers permanently.

Apparently, there is no official reason for this psionic-draining phenomenon. I use psionics in my DRAGONLANCE campaign, a byproduct of the passing of the Graygem. The draining came as a result of the magical explosion at the end of the second dragon war, affecting all those not already gifted with psionics, which incidentally were a handful of those who were believed to possess wild magic. Only their ancestors possess psionic potential, and many of them are unaware that such powers exist. As a result, psionics in the Fourth Age are few and far between. I would welcome others' thoughts on this subject.

Chris Reeves
Rochedale, Australia

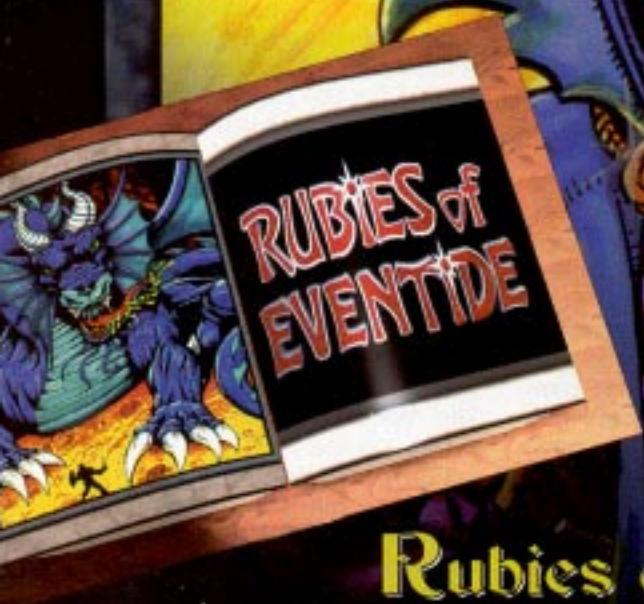
Role Over, AD&D

I'm writing in response to Christopher Manning's letter about the SAGA rules. First, I'd like to quote him: "Maybe I'm just old fashioned, but the thought of leaving my dice bag at home makes me want to be there with it." If you *need* your dice to play a roleplaying game, then you are not roleplaying, you're *roll* playing. The SAGA system is trying to get back to the roleplaying roots of AD&D, something that many people don't see anymore.

Chris mentions that SAGA lacks the detail of AD&D, but that's the beauty

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of the SAGA system. In AD&D, it's easy to get bogged down in the numbers of the game, losing the intensity of the moment. One of my favorite AD&D campaigns was when the DM rolled everything but saving throws. Instead of relying on dice, we actually had to think to survive. Sure, there were plenty of fights, but instead of having to calculate anything, the DM did it all. A round involving 12 characters and more enemies took only one minute. No action lost there!

SAGA takes this one step further, allowing the players actually to *choose* what they want to put down. In AD&D, whether you hit or miss when you attack is mostly chance, since you're rolling dice. The SAGA system allows the player to play a low-numbered card, showing they believe the task is easy or unimportant, or playing a high-numbered card, meaning they *need* to succeed!

Then we get to magic. Chris believes the magic system is a big disappointment. I, on the other hand, find the magic system in SAGA to be vastly superior to AD&D magic in most respects. One of the things that slows down an adventure most is a spell that no one is exactly sure about, so it has to be looked up in the books. Instead of having a set spell list that the mage must adhere to, a mage in SAGA can *create* the spell effect they want on the fly! The power is nearly limitless! I do admit, the durations of spells are limited, but if you use the

SAGA rules elsewhere, as in the RAVENLOFT conversion in *DRAGON Magazine* #240, then I find the magic rules better than those in the AD&D game, hands down.

The SAGA System is simple yet elegant. It's a good system to use to introduce someone to roleplaying or to entertain long-time campaigners. The important thing to remember is *role over roll*. Dice are a necessary evil in AD&D as far as I'm concerned, yet some see them as the end-all and be-all of RPGs. Any thoughts?

Chris Merritt
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High-Level Blues

I agree with the idea of limiting magic. If it becomes too common, magic slips from being fantastic to mundane and thus becomes boring. Furthermore, the number of NPC adventurers (especially high-level adventurers) should also be limited. There are two reasons for this.

One is the practical or ecological reason. High-level adventurers need experience points, and the most common way to gain experience points is to kill monsters/villains. If you have too many adventurers, there won't be enough monsters/villains to go around. A useful metaphor is that of the carnivores and herbivores of the natural world. There is only about one carnivore for every thousand or so herbivores. If too many adventurers upset the delicate balance, many monsters would become extinct. The adventurers would work themselves out of a job. I realize that as a DM you could put as many monsters as you want on the world, but then you have another problem. If there are so many monsters in the world, why haven't they destroyed the PC civilization already? The only way in which a many-monster campaign would work is if it were set in a place where there are large expanses of untamed or wild territory, and the adventurers are explorers or pioneers.

The other reason to limit high-level NPCs is that too many of them make PCs less special. The PCs are supposed to be great heroes; they have something special about them that drives them to fight villains and destroy evil. They walk down the street, and people shout with adoration and fall down in worship, much as happens to

the movie and rock stars of today. If adventurers become commonplace, the common people wouldn't look up to them anymore. Your paladin enters the tavern, and instead of being the center of attention, the drunks keep drinking, the gamblers continue gambling, and the bartender thinks to himself, "Another one of your average, run-of-the-mill paladins" and asks whether you want an ale. It is depressing to walk into a tavern where everyone you meet is higher level than you.

The second topic I wish to address is the *Skills and Powers* book. Many have complained about the super PCs created with the book upsetting the balance of the game. In my opinion, it is impossible for PCs to get so powerful that the DM cannot control them. The DM is supreme in his game. If the PCs reach a level of power that approaches godhood, use gods as their enemies. If the PCs become powerful because of the *Skills and Powers* book, create an NPC villain using the rules. Give your villain a Muscle subability of 20. Use low-level "goons" to soften up your PCs before bringing out your major and powerful villains. The "Ancient Villains" article (issue #238) and the "101 Dirty Orc Tricks" (#239) are really useful. Twenty goblins armed with bows and hidden in ambush can shoot 40 arrows even before the PCs roll for surprise.

In my campaign, I gave one of my PCs a special attack that deals out 10d8 hp damage and can affect multiple enemies at once. It might be a bit excessive in most AD&D campaigns, but I can still deal with it. I am thinking of using werewolves on my PCs, because they don't have any magical weapons. Imagine their screams of horror when the moon rises and their low-level adversaries suddenly become much deadlier. I am also creating a monster based on the alien from the *Alien* movies. How many paladins would it take to kill an alien queen?

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Canada



Question of the Month

Which player-character races should appear in the core rules of an AD&D® game 3rd edition? Which should be relegated to optional rules?

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Sage Advice

by Skip Williams

THIS MONTH'S QUESTIONS, all straight from the mailbag, have the sage delving into the workings of spells and proficiencies from the AD&D® game.

Can a character who casts a *symbol* spell ever be affected by the *symbol*? If so, how does caster avoid setting off the *symbol* when it's finished? Exactly how do you decide who or what is affected when a *symbol* is triggered? Exactly how long does a *symbol* last, and how long does it keep working once triggered? Is there any way to make a *symbol* permanent? How can a *symbol* be removed?

The *symbol* spell is widely misunderstood and is scheduled for a major overhaul. Here's a preview of the revised spell, which works the same way for both wizards and priests. The official version will appear in the *Wizard's Spell Compendium, Volume IV* (TSR product #2177), which will be released in fall of 1998.

Can a character who casts a *symbol* spell ever be affected by the *symbol*?

Symbol

(Conjuration/Summoning)

(Geometry)

7th-level Priest Spell, 8th-level Wizard Spell

Sphere: Guardian

Range: Touch

Components: V, S, M

Duration: Special

Casting Time: 3 or 1 turn

Area of Effect: 60' radius

Saving Throw: None or neg.

This spell allows the caster to scribe any of the potent runes described below.

A *symbol* has no effect unless the caster places it in plain sight and in a prominent location.

As a default, a *symbol* is triggered whenever a creature does one or more of the following, as selected by the spell caster: reads, touches, or passes over the rune, looks at the rune, or passes through a portal bearing the rune.

In this case, "reading" the rune means any attempt to study, identify, or fathom its meaning. Throwing a cover over a *symbol* to render it invisible and inoperative triggers it if it reacts to touch. To trigger a *symbol*, a creature must be within 60 feet of the rune.

The caster can set special triggering conditions of his own. These can be as simple or elaborate as the caster desires. Special conditions for triggering a *symbol* can be based on a crea-

ture's name, identity, or alignment but otherwise must be based on observable actions or qualities. Intangibles such as level, class, Hit Dice, or hit points don't qualify. For example, a *symbol* can be set to activate when a lawful good creature approaches, but not when a paladin approaches.

A *symbol's* triggering conditions are always defensive in nature. A touch-triggered *symbol* remains untriggered if an item bearing the *symbol* is used to touch a creature. Likewise, a *symbol*

cannot be placed on a weapon and set to activate when the weapon strikes a foe.

Once cast, a *symbol's* triggering conditions cannot be changed. The caster ignores the effects of his own *symbols* and cannot inadvertently trigger them.

When triggered, a *symbol* affects all creatures within a 60' radius, except for the caster and any individuals attuned to it (see below). If a *symbol* has a pass phrase, anyone using it remains immune to that particular rune's effects so long as the individual remains within 60 feet of the rune. If the character leaves the radius and returns later, he must use the pass phrase again. Once triggered, a *symbol* remains active until its duration expires; creatures that subsequently meet an active *symbol's* triggering conditions suffer its effects.

A *symbol* can be quickly drawn in the air or on some surface, or it can be carefully inscribed on a surface.

A quickly drawn *symbol* has a casting time of 3. The only material components required are a small amount of mercury and phosphorus. The resulting rune becomes active immediately. It lasts one turn per caster level and glows faintly while it lasts. *Symbols of fear, hopelessness, pain, or persuasion* can be used in this manner.

When drawing a *symbol* quickly, the caster can instantly attune any number of creatures to the *symbol* rendering them immune to its effects, provided the creatures are within 60 feet of the rune when it is created and that the caster is aware of their presence.

A carefully inscribed *symbol* has a casting time of one turn. The *symbol* is inactive when finished and remains so indefinitely until triggered. Once triggered, it becomes active and glowing, usually lasting one turn per caster level. Some *symbols* can burn out more quickly. For example, a *symbol of death* ends when it has slain 80 hit points worth of creatures, or after one turn per level of the caster, whichever comes first. The material components for a carefully inscribed *symbol* are mercury and phosphorus, plus powdered diamond and opal worth at least 5,000 gp each.

When creating a carefully inscribed rune, the caster can specify a password or phrase that prevents a creature using it from triggering the *symbol*.

The caster also can attune any number of creatures to the symbol, but this can extend the casting time. Attuning one or two creatures takes negligible time. Attuning a small group (up to 10 creatures) takes an hour. Attuning an entire household (up to 25 creatures) takes a day. Attuning larger groups takes proportionately longer, as the DM sees fit.

Known symbols include:

Death: One or more creatures within the radius, whose total hit points do not exceed 80, are irrevocably slain as though struck by the sixth-level Wizard spell *death spell*. Creatures of lowest Hit Dice or levels are slain first. This *symbol* must be carefully inscribed.

Discord: All creatures within the radius immediately fall into loud bickering and arguing. Meaningful communication is impossible. If the affected creatures have different alignments, there is a 50% chance that they attack each other. Bickering lasts 5d4 rounds; fighting lasts 2d4 rounds. This *symbol* must be carefully inscribed on a surface.

Fear: This *symbol* can be drawn quickly or carefully inscribed. Creatures within the radius are afflicted by a powerful version of the 4th-level wizard spell *fear*. If drawn quickly, this *symbol* imposes a -4 penalty to saving throws. If the rune is carefully inscribed, the saving throw penalty rises to -8.

Hopelessness: This symbol can be drawn quickly or carefully inscribed. All creatures within the radius must attempt saving throws vs. spell; there is a -4 penalty if the rune is carefully inscribed. If the saving throw fails, the creature suffers from hopelessness for 3d4 turns and submits to simple demands from foes, such as "surrender" or "get out"; the effect is similar to the third-level Wizard spell *suggestion*. If no foes are present to make demands, there is a 25% chance that a hopeless creature proves unable to take any action except standing in place. If the creature remains free to act, there is a 25% chance it retreats from the rune at normal speed. In either case, the creature can defend normally if attacked.

Insanity: One or more creatures within the radius, whose combined hit points do not exceed 120, become insane and act as though affected by the fourth-level wizard spell *confusion*. Insanity lasts until a *heal*, *restoration*, or

wish spells is used to remove the affliction. This *symbol* must be carefully inscribed.

Pain: Creatures within the radius suffer wracking pains that reduce Dexterity scores by two points and impose a -4 attack penalty. Both effects last 2d10 turns. This *symbol* can be drawn quickly or inscribed carefully.

Persuasion: This *symbol* can be drawn quickly or inscribed carefully. All creatures within the radius must attempt saving throws vs. spell; there is a -4 penalty if the rune is carefully inscribed. If the saving throw fails, the creature becomes the same alignment as the caster for 1d20 turns. During this time, affected creatures become friendly to the caster as though subjected to the first-level wizard spell *charm person*.

Sleep: Creatures within the radius fall into a catatonic slumber if they have 8+1 HD or fewer. (Characters are affected if they are 8th level or lower.) Sleeping creatures cannot be awakened for 1d12+4 turns. This *symbol* must be carefully inscribed.

Spell Loss: Any creature within the radius immediately loses 1d4 spells from memory. The DM should determine which spells are lost randomly. Creatures with no memorized spells are unaffected. Creatures who have some memorized spells, but not enough to satisfy the loss, suffer no further effects. This *symbol* must be carefully inscribed.

Stunning: One or more creatures within the radius, whose total hit points do not exceed 160, become stunned for 3d4 rounds. Stunned creatures drop what they are holding and cannot take any meaningful actions. They cannot

unless the *symbol's* effect is instantaneous (*death*, *spell loss*) or the description specifies another remedy (*insanity*). The rune itself can be removed with a successful *erase* spell or by a successful *dispel magic* targeted solely on the rune.

Destruction of the surface where a *symbol* rests destroys the rune but also triggers its effects.

Permanent Symbols: A *symbol* can be rendered permanent with the eighth-level Wizard spell *permanency* provided it is carefully inscribed upon a permanent, non-portable surface such as a wall or door. A *permanency* spell extends a *symbol's* basic duration of one turn per caster level indefinitely. When triggered, a permanent *symbol* usually glows for about a turn, but there is no limit to how many times it can be triggered. If the *symbol* can affect only a limited number of hit points worth of creatures, the limit applies each round. For example, a permanent *symbol of death* could slay 80 hit points worth of creatures every round.

Does the spellcraft proficiency allow a character to identify magical items? If so, can the character tell exactly what powers the items has or just whether it's magical?

No. The spellcraft proficiency is no substitute for a *detect magic* or *identify* spell. Spellcraft gives the character an understanding of spells and magical processes. When used to examine an item, it allows a character to identify "magical or magically endowed constructs for what they are." For purposes of the proficiency, an item must have been created wholly or extensively

Does the spellcraft proficiency allow a character to identify magic items?

communicate, employ spells, use magical items, initiate psionic abilities, use spell-like powers, fight, or move freely. Movement is limited to one-third the creature's current movement rate or a rate of 3, whichever is less. Attacks against stunned creatures gain a +4 bonus. This *symbol* must be carefully inscribed.

A successful *dispel magic* removes the effects of a *symbol* from a creature

through magic to qualify as a magical construct. Items that have simply received enchantments or been altered through magic don't qualify. For example, a character with the spellcraft proficiency could recognize a sword created with *Nolzur's marvelous pigments* or a *major creation* spell as a magical construct. If the same character found a *holy avenger* sword, however, her spellcraft proficiency could help her determine that

the sword was suitable for receiving an enchantment, but not whether it actually held an enchantment or what that enchantment might be.

Other "magical constructs" include the various wall spells, golems, simulacra, and homonculi.

Items or creatures that have been merely altered by magic, such as by an *enlarge*, *polymorph*, or *shapechange* spell, are not "magical constructs."

Is it possible for a character with the fishing proficiency to cook the fish he has caught, or must the character also have the cooking proficiency?

The rules assume that anyone can perform simple culinary tasks such as cleaning and cooking fish. Check out the cooking proficiency description, which states that all characters have rudimentary cooking skills; that means any dolt can drop a fish into a frying pan and scoop it out again before it burns to a crisp. A character with the cooking proficiency needn't make a proficiency check to perform such a mundane task (nor would non-proficient characters have to make any kind of dice roll). Should the party find it necessary to prepare a truly magnificent meal from the fish (perhaps to persuade the local werebear not to eat them instead), they'd need a proficient cook and a successful proficiency check.

The wizard spell *Nahal's reckless dweomer* from the Tome of Magic has been sowing confusion in my gaming group for quite some time. The spell description says there is a small chance for a wizard successfully to cast whatever spell she wants and that a wild surge always occurs. It also says to add the wizard's level

onto the wild surge roll on the table. What exactly indicates the success or failure of the intended spell?

Success or (more likely) failure depends on the result from **Table 2: Wild Surge Results**. Any wild surge result that includes some manifestation of the original spell effect is a "success." Such results include #60 (spell functions; any applicable saving throw is not allowed), #61 (spell appears to fail when cast, but occurs 1d4 rounds later), #73 (spell is cast; material components and memory of spell are retained), and #99 (spell has a minimum duration of 1 turn). The "spell" is whatever effect the character named when casting the *reckless dweomer*.

I'm having a hard time trying to sort out the differences between the bladesong fighting style from page 70 of the *Complete Book of Elves* and the bladesinger kit from page 88 of the same book. Can a bladesinger learn the bladesong style? If so, what benefits does she receive? Exactly what sort of weapon proficiencies, weapons styles, style specializations, and weapon specializations can a bladesinger learn? Can a bladesinger or character who knows the bladesong style use all the style's benefits at once? What kind of weapons can be used with the style? Can weapons that can be used one- or two-handed (bastard swords, for example) be used with the style?

The bladesong style from page 70 is available to any elf warrior, rogue, or priest. Non-elves, including half elves and drow, cannot learn the style. Bladesong is essentially an unusual version of single-weapon style specialization (see the *Complete Fighter's Handbook*, page 62). The character must choose a particular type of weapon (not a class of weapons) to use with the style, and it must be a one-handed weapon. To claim any benefits from the style, the character must have one hand free. If the bladesinger holds her weapon in two hands, she loses all bladesong benefits. A character can use only one bladesong benefit (see *CBE*, page 72) during a round but can switch between them from round to round.

Since bladesong is a style specialization, the character is free to learn other styles or weapon specializations if her class allows them. Prudent DMs will limit a weapon and style specialist

to the best available specialization bonus rather than allowing them to accumulate. For example, if an elf fighter with specialization in the long sword and two slots of bladesong chooses to use the bladesong attack bonuses, she would gain a +2 attack bonus (from bladesong) and a +2 damage bonus (from weapon specialization). The lesser attack bonus of +1 from weapon specialization is ignored.

The bladesinger kit from page 88 is for elf fighter/mages who dedicate their lives to bladesong. The character is assumed to spend three weapon proficiency slots on a single weapon and the bladesong style, but she gains the benefits listed on pages 89-90 instead of the ones on page 72. The bladesinger can choose any weapon normally available to fighter/mages for bladesinging, subject to the limitations noted above. As a multi-classed character, a bladesinger cannot choose to specialize in a weapon and cannot learn any additional style specializations. (Bladesong counts as the one style specialization the character can learn; see *CFH*, page 62.)

Note that the kit description contains a few errors. The Weapon Proficiencies section on page 88 should read: Bonus: None. Required: Proficiency in a one-handed weapon, bladesong style specialization (two slots). Recommended: None.

The Special Hindrances section on page 90 erroneously says that a bladesinger can never learn more than one weapon. This is not the case, though she suffers at least a -1 attack penalty when wielding a weapon other than their primary one; this penalty is cumulative with any non-proficiency penalty the character might suffer. Further, as a fighter a bladesinger automatically knows all four weapon styles from the *Complete Fighter's Handbook*.



Several visitors to the Williams household report that Skip and his wife, Penny, successfully completed a series of cooking proficiency checks and served their guests a sumptuous Thanksgiving feast.

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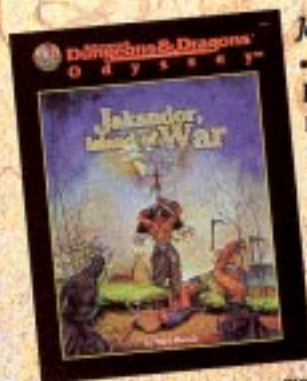
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Out of Character

Steps To Success

by Peter D. Adkison

ONE OF THE THINGS I LOVE most about roleplaying is tinkering with game systems. A time-honored technique for doing this is cannibalizing cool ideas from other game systems. So when I first got my hands on the ALTERNITY® game rules, part of my interest was to see if there were cool ideas I could integrate into my AD&D® campaign. I was not disappointed.

The heart of the ALTERNITY system—the “core mechanic”—will seem familiar to most AD&D game players. It’s a skill-check system that functions similarly to the AD&D proficiency system, with a few improvements. Basically you have a skill level in various skills (like picking pockets, forensics, or computer weapons systems operations), and you roll 1d20 vs. the skill when you try to use it. Skill levels of

8 to 12 are common, and climbing higher than that makes you pretty good. I play a fraal psionist with 16s and 17s in five or six psionic skills, and he seems to hold his own all right. As your character advances in levels, there are mechanisms for improving these skills. So far, sounds just like AD&D non-weapon proficiencies, right?

The ALTERNITY system takes the idea one step further by introducing degrees of success. If you roll lower than or equal to your ability score, you have an *ordinary* success; if you roll lower than or equal to half of your ability score, you have a *good* success; and if you roll less than or equal to one quarter of your score, you’ve achieved an *amazing* success. The ALTERNITY mechanic also uses the idea of situation modifiers; if there’s something about the situation that makes this particular lock harder to pick than ordinary locks, there’s a penalty to the d20 roll. The penalty is simply another die that must be rolled with the d20 and added to it before comparing to the character’s skill to see whether it’s a failure, ordinary success, good success, or amazing success. The stiffer the penalty the game master wants to assign, the larger the penalty die. A slightly more difficult task might add

1d4 to the d20 roll, while a near impossible accomplishment might require a second d20. Again, this is a great idea that can be used “as is” in AD&D without skipping a beat.

Of course this idea could be taken further by applying it to things other than non-weapon proficiencies.

Thieving skills are a good example. Thieving skills are expressed as a percentile score, so you’d start by dividing them each by 5, converting them to the 1-20 base scale. A Climb Walls score of 85% would be converted to a 17. Then, with a Climb Walls skill of 17, you’d roll 1d20 and you’d need a 17 or less for an ordinary success, 8 or less for a good one, and 4 or less for an amazing success. A standard cliff wall might be scalable with a situational die modifier of 1d4, but a smoother, nearly vertical fortress wall might require rolling 1d20 + 1d8, while scaling past that overhanging ledge might require 2d20!

Want to add some variety to the morale bonus for bardic singing? Make it a proficiency roll based, for example, on level plus Charisma. An ordinary success yields the standard +1 on attack rolls, while a good success might yield a +2, amazing +3. Of course, a failure in this situation is still a failure.

One of the attractions of this line of thinking is the idea of putting as many things as possible under a consistent “core mechanic,” so that once you learn how to use the mechanic effectively, you know how to play most of the game. The *PLAYERS OPTION™: Skills & Powers* book already breaks down various classes into specific skills, essentially making it easy to turn your game into more of a skill-based system. Integrating these two ideas together is probably going to be the subject of my next major tinkering session!

Taking this idea into my AD&D campaign was a slam dunk. It’s clearly an improvement, and it’s simple as heck.

Have a DM Tip?

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The only thing Peter loves more than tinkering with the AD&D rules is his wife, Cathleen, who helps keep Peter from getting too crazy with the game.

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Those skilled in defense hide
in the deepest depths of the earth;
those skilled in attack maneuver
in the highest heights of the sky.
Therefore they can protect themselves
and achieve complete victory.

— Sun Tzu
The Art of War



New Flying Creatures and Their Domain

by Michael Lambert

illustrated by David Day

INTELLIGENT FLYING CREATURES are some of the most efficient and deadly opponents that your player characters (PCs) can face. Flying creatures have many tactical advantages over ground-based characters. Their ability to fly over or around obstructions lets them outmaneuver non-flying enemies, they can avoid large-scale engagements when they wish, they can live in areas inaccessible to non-flying enemies, and they can attack while remaining beyond the range of their opponents' melee weapons. In short, AD&D® PCs are at a severe disadvantage when forced to battle intelligent flying creatures.

In addition, intelligent flying creatures can enhance their natural advantages. As a matter of evolutionary necessity, creatures in the AD&D game employ tactics that emphasize their natural abilities. Dragons fight differently from giant bats, who fight differently from griffons, who fight differently from pixies. Members of intelligent flying races fight in ways that emphasize their strengths and hide their weaknesses. The difference between intelligent races and other natural flyers is that the former can create tools to complement their strengths. Many of these tools take the form of magical items designed to counter the types of threats they face in battle.

The Advantage of Flight

PCs have little room for error when facing opponents who are more maneuverable, who can choose when and where to fight, and who can withdraw at the first sign of danger. Intelligent flyers also have the advantage of being able to attack from a distance while limiting their exposure to a counterattack. Flying keeps them out of the range of melee weapons, allowing them to weaken the enemy before engaging in hand-to-hand combat. Unless the PCs can also fly, their opponents dictate the terms of battle. Groundling PCs will not typically be in a position to take the fight to the enemy; they must react to the offensive moves of a more mobile foe.

Intelligent flying creatures often use surprise to their advantage. Once they have

identified a threat, they use their superior movement skills to attack the enemy when most vulnerable. These flyers assess which characters pose the greatest threat and strike at them immediately. Spellcasters are targeted first, followed by those with missile weapons. If these characters are neutralized, the flyers can attack the grounded warriors at their leisure. Likewise, intelligent flyers who have magical or innate abilities do not move within combat range of the party without first using whatever defensive spells or abilities they have.

Flying creatures can attack from many directions at once, including from above. While one group occupies the warriors, a second group can swoop in from above to attack spellcasters. Once a spellcaster becomes involved in melee, his impact on the rest of the battle becomes negligible.

Finally, intelligent flying creatures often retreat when the tide of battle turns against them. Flying gives them the ability to disengage from a battle and withdraw to safety, where they can heal and plan a new attack.

Fighting Flyers

The advantages that flying races have over ground-based enemies are considerable. Unless ground-based forces have magic at their disposal, battles between the two groups quickly become lopsided. Fortunately, most groups of AD&D PCs have access to magic, but it takes more than just magic to defeat intelligent flying creatures—it also takes a well-planned and well-executed battle plan.

The Best Offense . . .

The key to fighting intelligent flying creatures is to fight a defensive battle. Fighting these flyers in their element is not a good offensive option. Unless the flying PCs have the strength and numbers to defeat all the attacking creatures, they might find themselves in a hostile air battle with little support. Few events in the AD&D game are more painful than suffering damage while flying; if the damage doesn't kill the target, the fall usually does. When the mental commands



controlling the flying cease, gravity once again exerts its influence and a PC plummets to the ground. If, for some reason, a device that imparts flying continues to function even after unconsciousness or death, the character might find himself in the unenviable position of remaining in the air, perhaps to be taken to the victor's lair as a trophy of war.

Since most PCs will not be attacking flying opponents in the sky, choosing a defensible position on the ground becomes the most important tactical decision. Most attacks by aerial creatures take place in the wilderness, so PCs should look for natural formations that reduce their vulnerability to attacks from multiple directions. Forests, large rock formations, caves, or any other natural feature that forces the flying creatures to attack from one direction are best suited for a defensive battle. If one of these defensible positions is not in the immediate vicinity, magic can help to find one (*augury, divination, speak with animals, stone tell*), to help the party move to one (*phantom steed, haste*), or to create one (*any wall spell, move earth, hallucinatory terrain, rope trick*).

Magic and Missiles

Timing is critical once a defensive site has been chosen. Spellcasters with defensive spells available should cast them as soon as possible. Spells like *protection from normal missiles, fog cloud, wind wall, and invisibility 10' radius* can reduce the damage the flyers can inflict from a distance. Spellcasters should use their powerful spells at the beginning of combat rather than save them and not have the chance to use them at all. If the PC group is large enough, a warrior should keep flying creatures away from the spellcasters; regardless of what is happening to the rest of the warriors, the bodyguard should not become involved in the general battle unless absolutely necessary.

In addition to spell attacks, missile fire is important in the early stages of a battle. Both missile fire and spell attacks should be concentrated on individual creatures. Wounded flying creatures can easily withdraw from a battle, whereas creatures involved in melee have little chance of retreating and attacking from a different direction. With flyers, a character could fire his bow for three rounds, only to see

the creature fly out of range just before receiving the telling blow. By concentrating fire, the party increases its chance of eliminating flyers before they can retreat to fight another day.

Down to Earth

Missile fire, regardless of its effectiveness, will not win the battle for the PCs. Flyers with missile weapons will eventually dominate the battlefield, unless the PCs can force them within range of their warriors' melee weapons. The flyers won't land on their own, though, since the key to their success is their airborne mobility. Therefore, the players must take actions that put the flying creatures in a position where they must either engage the party in hand-to-hand combat or break off the battle.

The key to forcing the flyers to land is the PCs' own mobility. While the flyers can use their airborne mobility to remain outside of melee range, it doesn't allow them to hinder the PCs' ability on the ground. The PCs need not stand and fight whenever they are attacked by flyers with missile weapons—they are free to withdraw from the battle unless the flyer's land. Although they may be constantly harassed as they withdraw, the PCs can choose a defensible position that is better suited to their abilities.

When traveling, the warrior is should remain on the outside of the group. If the flyers don't land to stop the PCs' movement, the players can either find an area where aerial opponents can't attack at all without landing (cave, underwater, thick forest) or simply retreat from the battle. If the flyers do land to stop the PCs' movement, the warriors on the outside of the group can bring their weapons to bear and inflict serious damage on the grounded flyers.

Mounted groups have an even greater mobility advantage. Horses are usually faster than flyers, so unless the flyers land and force the PC warriors to fight, the PCs might be able simply to outrun them. If the flyers land, the PCs might find themselves in a position where they can dominate the battlefield. The warriors have an advantage, facing opponents that are uncomfortable fighting on the ground. Determined resistance might force the flyers to retreat, and once they do, the PCs can continue their withdrawal to a more suitable battlefield.

The Big Picture

Regardless of the tactics that the PCs use to fight flying opponents, their abilities make them an extremely effective and challenging enemy. Flying creatures force players to visualize a three-dimensional battlefield, requiring them to use every ability they have to emerge victorious. In addition, apart from providing a specific threat to the players, intelligent flying races can have a significant impact on the development of any campaign world. Their tactical advantages over ground-based armies give them the ability to control large amounts of territory, and an aggressive flying race could establish a powerful empire.

Here are four new flying races suitable for use in any AD&D campaign, along with the magical items they have created to make them an even greater threat to ground-based enemies. Of course, their enemies have created magical items of their own to even the odds, and these are also detailed. Even with these items, though, the advantage in struggles between flying and grounded creatures is clearly with the former, so PCs must be prepared to use every ability they have in order to achieve victory.

The four races detailed in the following pages can be used as direct opponents of the PCs. As stimulus for world events, any of the races could be involved in a long-running military campaign with global implications. Alternatively, players might choose to roleplay one of the races, adding a new dimension to any adventuring group.

Flying Characters in Your Campaign World

While they are presented at first in the same format as the MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM® entries, the flying races detailed hereafter can make interesting PCs, at the discretion of the Dungeon Master. Individual DMs can decide whether their campaign world contains any of the detailed races, and which of races can be chosen as player characters. **Tables 1-5** provide the details necessary to use these races as player character races. **Table 1** details racial ability requirements, **Table 2** details class level limits, **Table 3** details thieving ability adjustments, **Table 4** details racial ability adjustments and

Table 1: Ability Requirements

| | Strength | Dexterity | Constitution | Intelligence | Wisdom | Charisma |
|---------|----------|-----------|--------------|--------------|--------|----------|
| Ashiera | 7/19 | 3/18 | 3/18 | 3/17 | 3/18 | 3/18 |
| Fainil | 3/17 | 7/19 | 3/18 | 3/18 | 3/18 | 3/18 |
| Masgai | 6/18 | 3/18 | 4/18 | 6/18 | 3/17 | 3/18 |
| Telvar | 3/18 | 6/18 | 6/19 | 3/18 | 3/18 | 3/18 |

Table 2: Character Class Limits

| | Warrior | Ranger | Paladin | Priest | Druid | Wizard | Thief | Bard |
|---------|---------|--------|---------|--------|-------|--------|-------|------|
| Ashiera | U | — | — | 5 | — | — | — | — |
| Fainil | 7 | 7 | — | 5 | — | 5 | U | — |
| Masgai | U | 9 | — | — | — | 4 | — | — |
| Telvar | 9 | 9 | — | 7* | 6* | — | 7 | 7 |

* Only female Telvar may be priests or druids.

Table 3: Thieving Skill Adjustments

| | Pick Pockets | Open Locks | F/R Traps | Move Silently | Hide in Shadows | Detect Noise | Climb Walls | Read Languages |
|--------|--------------|------------|-----------|---------------|-----------------|--------------|-------------|----------------|
| Fainil | — | — | — | -15% | +10% | +5% | — | — |
| Telvar | +10% | — | — | +5 | +5% | — | — | -20% |

Table 5 details the average ages for each race.

Each of the following MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM entries also includes role-playing notes for those who wish to use these flying creatures as player characters. As with any AD&D race, these notes are only guidelines, and personalities might well differ from individual to individual. In general, though, player characters of one of the following races tend to be outsiders from their own society, with few roots to tie them down. Adventurers are usually young, with a desire to experience more of the world than their society allows. Since none of the races interact freely with non-flying races, much of what these adventurers encounter will be new to them. Prior experiences will have been limited to their specific society, with Masgai the most sophisticated and Telvar the most rustic.

DMing Flying Characters

Each DM must make the decision as to whether one of these flying races can be used as a PC race. On the surface, the ability to fly would seem to give flying characters a significant advantage over non-flying characters. Flying characters can go places other characters can't, they can avoid certain types of traps, and they would have all the combat advantages described previously. These abilities certainly affect how DMs referee a

game, and some of the advantages might create imbalance.

In practice, though, the advantages these races have aren't unbalancing, due in part to the nature of the AD&D game. The game's emphasis on teamwork in overcoming obstacles requires flying characters to work together with the group to achieve shared goals. The abilities that a flying character has, much like the mining skills of a dwarf or the secret door detection skills of an elf, should benefit the entire party, not just the individual PC. The social problems these races encounter, along with their level limitations, help balance their physical advantages.

Consequently, refereeing flying characters is not much more difficult than refereeing any other type of character. For safety and teamwork reasons, flying characters must usually remain with the other PCs, reducing their mobility advantage. They can't strike out on their own without exposing themselves to danger, making them less of a wild card for DMs to handle. In combat, flying creatures are targeted by opposing archers and

spellcasters, so the ability to fly must be used wisely, lest the flying PC become a too-frequent target.

In addition, DMs have the advantage of adapting their campaign world to account for the actions of the party. If an imbalance is created by allowing a player to roleplay a flying character, DMs can adjust opponent actions or restrict the use of the flying ability. The idea behind the creation of these new races is to add some interesting twists to a campaign world, not to give characters an unfair advantage. Once the impact of a flying race has been gauged, DMs can modify the campaign to ensure that the PCs can use their special abilities while still facing appropriately difficult challenges. Remember that game balance exists to ensure fun, not to limit it.

Table 4: Ability Adjustments

| | S | D | C | I | W | Ch |
|---------|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Ashiera | +1 | -1 | — | -1 | — | — |
| Fainil | -1 | +1 | -1 | — | — | — |
| Masgai | +1 | — | — | — | -1 | — |
| Telvar | -1 | — | +1 | — | — | — |

Table 5: Age

| | Base Age | Variable | Maximum Age |
|---------|----------|----------|-------------|
| Ashiera | 15 | 1d4 | 50 |
| Fainil | 35 | 1d6 | 150 |
| Masgai | 60 | 2d6 | 200 |
| Telvar | 15 | 1d8 | 75 |

Fainil (Night Flyers)

| | |
|------------------|----------------------------|
| CLIMATE/TERRAIN: | Fortress/Subterranean City |
| FREQUENCY: | Very Rare |
| ORGANIZATION: | Military Group |
| ACTIVITY CYCLE: | Night |
| DIET: | Herbivore |
| INTELLIGENCE: | High to Supra (13-18) |
| TREASURE: | N x 5, Q x 2 |
| ALIGNMENT: | Chaotic Evil |

| | |
|-------------------|---------------------------|
| NO. APPEARING: | 5-15 |
| ARMOR CLASS: | 4 (flying), 6 (on ground) |
| MOVEMENT: | 3, Fly 12 (B) |
| HIT DICE: | 2 |
| THACO: | 19 |
| NO. OF ATTACKS: | 1 or 2 |
| DAMAGE/ATTACK: | By weapon |
| SPECIAL ATTACKS: | See below |
| SPECIAL DEFENSES: | See below |
| MAGIC RESISTANCE: | 50% |
| SIZE: | M (5½' tall) |
| MORALE: | Elite (14) |
| XP VALUE: | 270 |

The Fainil and Telvar originated on the same world, a planet known as Tir. The deadly conflict between the gray elves and drow on Tir occurred shortly after the world was created. The gray elves drove the drow underground, where the dark elves plotted their return to the surface for centuries. One of the questions the drow faced was how to deal with the Telvar, who were certain to side with the other surface races against any invasion from the subterranean drow. The Telvar's mobility could wreak havoc on the loosely organized humanoid tribes the drow planned to use to spearhead their conquest. The drow recognized the need to develop a flying contingent of their own, one that would be both loyal and willing to face the Telvar in their own element.

The Fainil were the result of this strategic necessity. The offspring of a selective breeding process between drow and tanar'ri allies, the Fainil have qualities of both ancestors. When the drow attacked the surface world, the Fainil were at the forefront of the greatest drow victories. This military superiority was proven when the war ended after 50 years and sunlight returned to Tir. While the rest of the drow were destroyed or driven underground, the two Fainil fortresses, Morvan and Moddan, withstood repeated assaults. The Fainil remain in their isolated strongholds to this day, gaining strength and plotting.

Since the war on Tir, the Fainil have spread slowly to other worlds, although the center of their society remains in the fortresses of Morvan and Moddan.

Fainil can be warriors, clerics, thieves, or wizards. Unlike ordinary drow, Fainil males tend toward dominance within Fainil society, although almost all clerics are still female.

Fainil have infravision to a range of 120 feet and suffer all the penalties from sunlight as do normal drow. Their tanar'ri ancestry gives them a good base AC, and they do not wear the typical drow mesh armor when flying although many wear it when in one of the two fortresses. They have a base magic resistance of 50%, like the drow, but this resistance does not increase as the Fainil advance in level.

Combat: The Fainil, like other drow, use hand-held crossbows (with drow sleep poison) and swords in combat. Because they can fly, their preferred method of attack is by ambush or surprise—always at night. Fainil fly quietly to attack, targeting spell-casters with their hand-held crossbows. There are few Fainil wizards, but they can cast their spells while flying. Most spells are directed at opposing wizards or priests, but when they attack as a small unit, Fainil use spells to protect the most important warriors.

Fainil are quick and agile in flight, but they do not walk well and fight awkwardly on the ground. All Fainil attack at a -2 penalty when they fight on the ground, and their Armor Class rises by two.

Fainil can use the following spells once per day: *dancing lights*, *faerie fire*, and *darkness*. Fainil above 4th level can use *know alignment* and *detect magic* once per day.

Fainil are immune to electrical attacks, a legacy of their tanar'ri heritage.

The Fainil resemble their drow ancestors, although they are slightly taller and usually have some distinguishing mark to indicate their tanar'ri ancestry. They all have huge, bat-like wings and slightly elongated fingers and toes. They wear tight clothing when flying elaborate robes and cloaks when in one of their two fortresses.

Ecology: Fainil are despoilers of nature, taking what they desire from the world and discarding anything they feel is no longer useful. They create little, preferring to steal necessities, artwork, magical items, and other treasure from "lesser" races. Fainil view all other intelligent creatures as beneath them and have no morality to speak of.

Fainil require little food to sustain themselves, another benefit of their tanar'ri ancestry. They are constantly improving the defensive capabilities of their fortresses and prefer to use slave labor whenever possible.

Habitat/Society: Fainil society is based around their fortresses of Morvan and Moddan. Other than a few individuals who, for various reasons leave Fainil society (see "Roleplaying Notes," below), all Fainil have lodgings within the vast halls of either fortress. They rarely are encountered in large numbers beyond two days' travel from either fortress.

The Fainil have close ties with the drow and other races of the Underdark but do not feel comfortable below ground. Most trading is done through intermediaries, and their access to the surface world gives the Fainil an advantage in most transactions. They are a rich and powerful race, strong enough that the human and demi-human races cannot drive them from their mountain fortresses.

Life within Morvan and Moddan is full of intrigue and political trickery. Unlike drow society, the Fainil hierarchy is not dominated by females. There are equal numbers of high-ranking men and women, although strong families still wield considerable power.

Roleplaying Notes

Fainil are universally despised by races who live on the surface world, and they find it difficult to co-exist with any other intelligent beings, whom they would prefer to conquer and enslave. Individual Fainil are mistrusted and persecuted in most regions.

Fainil who leave their dark fortresses to become adventurers usually do so for one of two reasons. Either their family has been disgraced and, to avoid death, they flee into the outside world, or they are perceived to be an *alykus*. These rare individuals, a result of the imperfect breeding program that created the Fainil, have the ability to become powerful wizards (16th-level limit) but lack the normal Fainil penchant for destruction. The *alykus* are viewed as threats to Fainil society and are ruthlessly dealt with once they have been identified. A few escape, though, to become outcasts of Fainil society.

Fainil are not as long-lived as their drow ancestors, typically living as long as half-elves. They care little for art or entertainment, and it is extremely rare to find one with a sense of humor. Fainil are fanatical in their devotion to the skills required of their class and choose training above all other recreational activities. While they do not trust others easily, Fainil are extremely loyal, particularly to those beside whom they enter battle.

Fainil Magical Items

Aerial Ward

The Fainil fear attack by other flying creatures. They have designed a magical ward that protects their fortresses from aerial assault by any non-drow. The ward is generated by a large crystal located in the central keep of each of the Fainil's two mountain fortresses. The power of the *aerial ward* extends 200 feet in all directions of each fortress. Any flying creature that enters the ward's effect suffers 2 hp damage and is thrust backward by a *gust of wind* spell. Any creature with drow ancestry can pass within the circle at will; the circle can also be lowered for up to an hour at a time from within the crystal's chamber by any wizard of 6th level or higher. The chamber where the crystal is kept also serves as a crypt for the Fainil dead. For every 100 Fainil interred within the crypt, the power of the crystal extends another foot beyond the fortress.

XP Value: nil

GP Value: nil

Fainil Armor

Fainil armor is similar to drow mesh armor (+1 to +3), masking the heat signature of the wearer, so infravision cannot detect the wearer. The wearer of the armor can still be viewed normally. The armor loses its enchantment when exposed to sunlight for more than two hours.

XP Value: 1,500 (+1)

GP Value: 3,000 (+1)

2,500 (+2)

5,000 (+2)

4,000 (+3)

8,000 (+3)

Flare Bolts

These magical bolts were created by dwarves for use against the night flyers. Fired from heavy crossbows, these bolts have two uses in combat. As a typical missile weapon, a *flare bolt* gains a +2 bonus to hit and causes quadruple damage against Fainil. The favored use of the flare bolt, though, is to illuminate battlefields where Fainil are attacking in force. The bolt is fired into the air and, at the apex of its flight, bursts into bright light, shedding illumination in a circle with a 150' diameter. Attacks against Fainil within this circle gain a +3 bonus, and any Fainil caught in the area of effect suffer a -3 attack penalty for two hours.

XP Value: 300

GP Value: 650



| | |
|------------------|----------------|
| CLIMATE/TERRAIN: | Mountains |
| FREQUENCY: | Rare |
| ORGANIZATION: | Solitary |
| ACTIVITY CYCLE: | Any |
| DIET: | Omnivore |
| INTELLIGENCE: | Medium |
| TREASURE: | M,Q |
| ALIGNMENT: | Lawful Neutral |

| | |
|-------------------|---------------------------------|
| NO. APPEARING: | 10-40 |
| ARMOR CLASS: | 6 |
| MOVEMENT: | 6, Fly 12 (B) |
| HIT DICE: | 2 |
| THACO: | 19 |
| NO. OF ATTACKS: | 2 or by weapon |
| DAMAGE/ATTACK: | 1-8 (+2)/1 -8 (+2) or by weapon |
| SPECIAL ATTACKS: | None |
| SPECIAL DEFENSES: | None |
| MAGIC RESISTANCE: | Nil |
| SIZE: | L (8' tall) |
| MORALE: | Fanatic (18) |
| XP VALUE: | 65 |

Telvar are aerial barbarians who live in mountainous regions far from civilized lands. They live in large clans and avoid contact with other races whenever possible.

Telvar are extremely tall, averaging almost 8 feet in height. They are quick and agile but not nearly as strong as humans or even elves. They have abnormally long fingers and toes, and they can use their feet to grip small objects. Telvar have large feathered wings that grow from their shoulders—pre-dominant colors are brown, gray, and white. Telvar have large, sharply pointed ears, as well as large eyes with two sets of eyelids. Telvar are usually heavily tattooed, the tattoos signifying important events such as the first hunt, a first kill, and family membership. Telvar dress in layers of loose-fitting clothing mostly the hides of various game animals.

Every male in each family is expected to be a proficient warrior and hunter; the weak do not usually survive childhood. Women are often trained as hunters and face the same rigorous training demands as the men. Women who aren't hunters either gather food or serve as family priests. All Telvar religious figures are women. While they cannot be the head of a family, they have great authority as spiritual and community advisors.

Telvar occasionally travel to cities for trade, but they feel uncomfortable when surrounded by multitudes of ground-based races. They are honorable in all their dealings and take extreme offense at being cheated or lied to. Telvar rarely develop strong relationships with other races, but they are staunch allies once they have committed themselves to an alliance. Of the four flying races detailed here, the Telvar are the least likely to be encountered as enemies of most bands of PCs.

Telvar have infravision to a range of 80 feet.

Combat: The Telvar are talented archers, able to fell their quarry from great distances while flying overhead. They are so skilled with the great bow that they gain a +2 bonus to damage for each successful bow attack. Telvar can never be specialized in melee weapons.

Telvar have very little magic to support combat operations. The priestly magic wielded by the females is used mainly for divination and healing, although female cleric/fighters are not unknown. Because of this lack of magic, Telvar consistently attack enemy spell-casters until they are neutralized. If they cannot defeat the spellcasters, they will withdraw until another opportunity presents itself.

If possible, and as long as their arrows hold out, Telvar attack ground-based enemies with missile fire. They do not engage in melee combat unless absolutely necessary or when an enemy has been severely weakened. Most Telvar wield long thin swords that inflict damage as short swords.

Ecology: The Telvar take great pains to live in harmony with the natural world. They realize that a balance must be maintained to ensure the long-term survival of each clan, so there is strict adherence to territorial hunting lands and no over-hunting within these lands. Travelers who pass through Telvar lands may do so without fear, provided they do not upset the balance that the Telvar have maintained for centuries.

Many races mistake the simple ways of the Telvar for a lack of intelligence. However, when necessary, the Telvar are capable of developing sophisticated military plans requiring complex co-ordination between clans. Those who have underestimated Telvar resolve have met with defeat, demonstrated by the fall of many humanoid bands that have tried to infringe upon Telvar territory.

Habitat/Society: Telvar are flying barbarians, building no cities and living off the land. They are fierce warriors, hardened by generations of subsistence living in harsh climates. The Telvar are nomads, traveling in large family groups that follow the yearly migrations of various herd animals.

The heads of every Telvar family meet every two years to settle disputes, discuss hunting strategies, and on rare occasions plan war against anyone infringing on their hunting grounds. Leadership in each Telvar family is determined by combat. Every three years, all warriors in each family are given the opportunity to challenge the current head of the family to ritual combat. Each battle lasts until one side concedes defeat. Defeated challengers often leave the family, either to start their own family or possibly to hire themselves out as mercenaries.

Roleplaying Notes

For some Telvar, the lure of the civilized world proves stronger than family ties. These young, idealistic individuals often leave the clan to find their fortune elsewhere. In addition, Telvar warriors who fail in their challenge for clan leadership almost always leave the family for a period of years, although many eventually return.

Telvar are comfortable with large groups and shared decision-making responsibilities. They can adapt their skill easily to the needs of a large adventuring group, but they prefer not to become involved in pitched battles. They often fulfill the role of scout and missile weapon specialist in a party. Telvar love to hunt, and they are masters of hit-and-run tactics and ambushes.

Telvar are used to hardship and the need to push themselves beyond their supposed physical limits. They expect similar sacrifices from their companions and have little

patience for individuals who do not contribute to the common good. Their lack of tact in these situations can lead to tension with other members of an adventuring party.

Due to their difficulty in maneuvering in small spaces, Telvar have a great fear of being underground.

Telvar Magical Items

Hunter Cloaks

The best hunter in each Telvar family wears a *hunter cloak*, a garment that is magically enhanced to make the wearer virtually invisible to creatures with animal intelligence. The wearer makes no sound when flying emits no smells, and absorbs any sound used by animals with echolocation. The *cloak* also gives the wearer *invisibility to animals* as long as the wearer is in the air; the *cloak* imparts no special benefits to wearers who are on the ground. The wearer can attack creatures with animal intelligence without losing the benefits of the *cloak*, but the *cloak* has no effect on any creatures with greater than animal intelligence.

XP Value: 1,500

GP Value: 3,000

Concussion Arrows

The Telvar excel at air-to-air combat. Their skills were put to the test against the Fainil. To aid in these battles, the female clerics of each family created *concussion arrows*, specifically designed for use against the Fainil. The arrows have a +3 bonus to hit and damage, and a successful hit causes the arrow to explode, creating a shock wave that stuns anyone within 10 feet of the blast who fails a save vs. spells. The stun effect lasts for only one round.

XP Value: 300

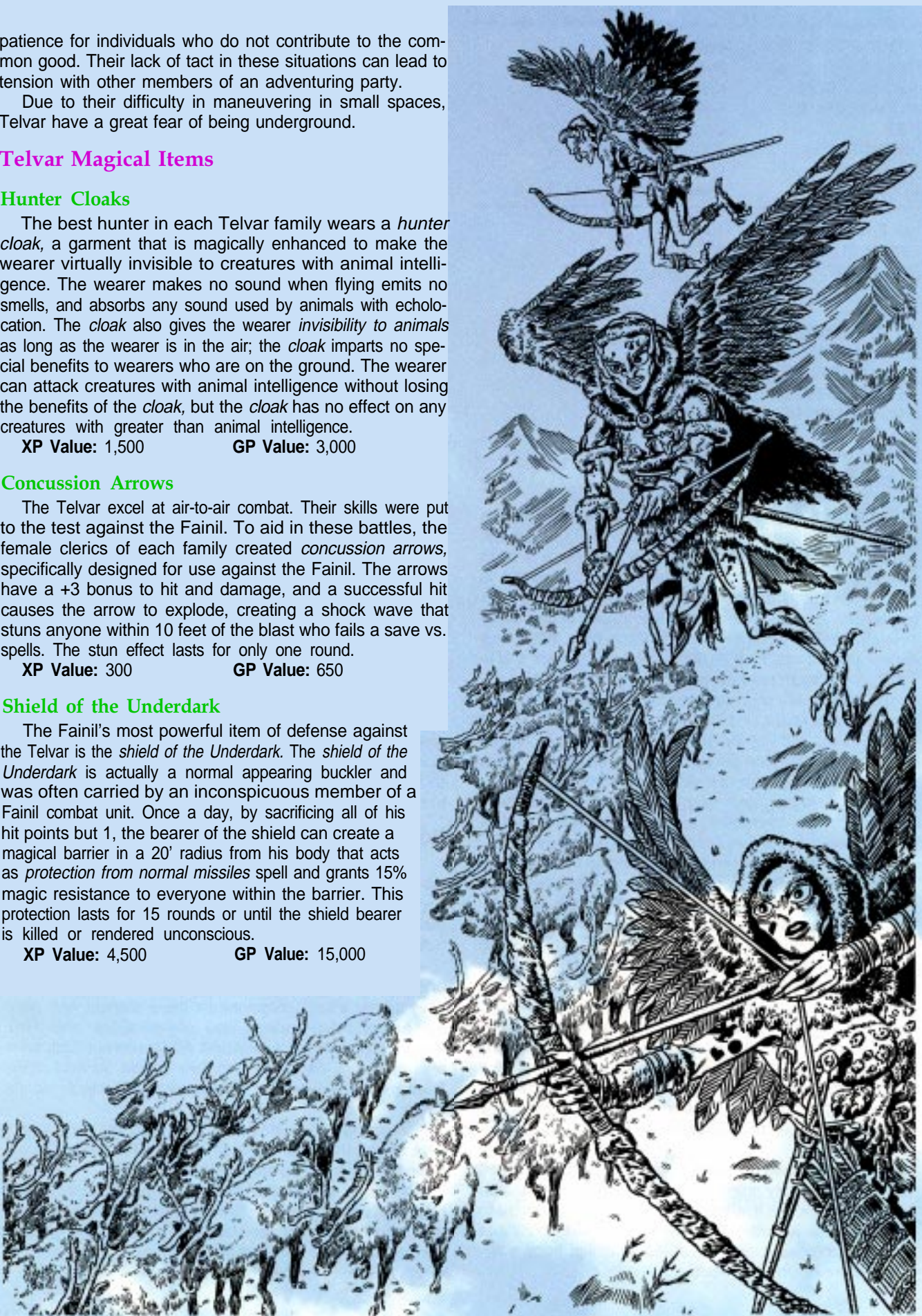
GP Value: 650

Shield of the Underdark

The Fainil's most powerful item of defense against the Telvar is the *shield of the Underdark*. The *shield of the Underdark* is actually a normal appearing buckler and was often carried by an inconspicuous member of a Fainil combat unit. Once a day, by sacrificing all of his hit points but 1, the bearer of the shield can create a magical barrier in a 20' radius from his body that acts as *protection from normal missiles* spell and grants 15% magic resistance to everyone within the barrier. This protection lasts for 15 rounds or until the shield bearer is killed or rendered unconscious.

XP Value: 4,500

GP Value: 15,000



| | |
|------------------|-----------------|
| CLIMATE/TERRAIN: | Coastal Regions |
| FREQUENCY: | Rare |
| ORGANIZATION: | Community |
| ACTIVITY CYCLE: | Any |
| DIET: | Omnivore |
| INTELLIGENCE: | Very |
| TREASURE: | C, 4 |
| ALIGNMENT: | Chaotic Neutral |

| | |
|-------------------|------------------|
| NO. APPEARING: | 10-20 |
| ARMOR CLASS: | 4 |
| MOVEMENT: | 6, 6 swim, 6 fly |
| HIT DICE: | 6 |
| THACO: | 12 |
| NO. OF ATTACKS: | 1 |
| DAMAGE/ATTACK: | 2-12 |
| SPECIAL ATTACKS: | Coldfire |
| SPECIAL DEFENSES: | Fog cloud |
| MAGIC RESISTANCE: | Nil |
| SIZE: | M (5½' tall) |
| MORALE: | Elite (13-14) |
| XP VALUE: | 975 |

The Ashiera are an intelligent race of aquatic humanoids who, in ages past, were greatly affected by Wild Magic. The Ashiera's unconscious manipulation of their home world's natural power dramatically changed their physiology in only a few generations. Before the Wild Magic lost its power, the Ashiera had gained the innate ability to fly through the skies as well as swim in the oceans. While they are not good flyers, their ability to exist underwater and in the air make them formidable opponents.

The Ashiera are short and stocky. They have gray skin, small ears and noses, and little body hair. Ashiera have gills on their necks and slightly webbed fingers and toes. Ridged layers of gray-blue skin sweep back from their brows. They wear little clothing, most of it slick and form-fitting. Their flying ability is innate, and they use a modified swimming motion to propel themselves across the sky. A few Ashiera wear Ashieran armor (see *DRAGON® Magazine Annual #1*).

The fierce territoriality and aggressiveness of the Ashiera usually leads to their complete control over the island chains around which they build their settlements. On occasion, the Ashiera occupy abandoned coastal cities, but they lack the foresight and interest to establish a land-based empire. They are easily angered and often lash out at nearby settlements if they feel they are threatened.

All Ashiera have the ability to generate coldfire 1/day from their fingertips. This special ability manifests itself as an ice storm in the air, causing 2-12 hp damage to any creatures in a 10' diameter circle. Underwater, the coldfire ability produces three ice daggers that inflict 1-6 hp damage on a successful attack roll (one roll per dagger). The range on both coldfire applications is 30 feet.

Combat: The Ashiera have relatively unsophisticated combat tactics. They prefer to swarm attackers both underwater and in the air, trusting in their superior movement to escape any losing battle. They use their coldfire ability and *Ashieran lances* (see below) to attack enemies from a distance before closing for melee.

The Ashiera can wrap fog around themselves twice a day for five rounds, creating a misty barrier that affords a -2 penalty to all missile attacks against them. Large groups of Ashiera use this ability to great psychological effect by approaching enemies as fast-moving storm clouds.

Ashiera are highly susceptible to fire, suffering an extra 1 hp damage per die of fire damage.

Ecology: The Ashiera are the most powerful of all intelligent aquatic races. They have been known to attack and occupy the settlements of other races, particularly aquatic elves. In addition, vessels sailing through their territorial waters are often raided for supplies and treasure, although the Ashiera occasionally welcome trading ships to their settlements. The Ashiera often possess treasure that they have salvaged from sunken vessels or forgotten underwater cities.

The Ashieran diet consists of fish, which they harvest, and an occasional land animal brought back from a raid.

Habitat/Society: The Ashiera are, for the most part, an aquatic race. They build nothing on land, and their settlements under the sea vary greatly in size. Most settlements are built in shallow waters near uninhabited islands, with vast distances between each settlement.

Because of the distance that separates Ashieran settlements, their society is difficult to categorize. Geography plays an important role in determining how different settlements develop. Settlements near rich natural resources often develop more sophisticated economic and political structures, while Ashiera in harsher climates live as hunters and gatherers.

The one constant of Ashieran society is its adaptability. Ashiera are short-lived. As a race, they place little emphasis on custom and tradition. Ethics, values, and laws change quickly from generation to generation, and Ashiera are quick to embrace new technologies or military concepts. Ashieran society tends toward isolationism. It is rare for any settlement to have long-term contact with any other civilized race.

Roleplaying Notes

The Ashiera are the most likely of the four flying races to join an adventuring band. The ties that bind them to their society are not as strong as those of the other races, and their ability to travel underwater gives them a wide range of locales to visit.

Ashiera do not take orders from others well, and they often change plans to take advantage of new circumstances. They do not always communicate these changes well, leading to misunderstandings and complications with non-Ashieran companions. In addition, Ashiera do not think twice about breaking oaths if it is to their benefit. Survival of the fittest is the one overriding philosophy of all Ashieran adventurers.

Ashiera hate to be defeated. Thus, they are fierce opponents when the odds are against them. The more dire the situation, the more passionate their response.

Ashiera must immerse themselves in saltwater at least once every three days, for at least an hour. Ashiera that are unable to immerse themselves lose 3 points of Strength and Constitution every day past the third day, and they will die within one week of such deprivation.

Ashieran Magical Items

Sword of Free Action

Ashieran warriors must be able to fight both in the air and under the waves. The most powerful warriors among them wield *swords of free action*. These weapons can be enchanted from +1 to +4 and grant the wielder same benefits as a *ring of free action*.

XP Value: 1,500 per "plus" **GP Value:** 3,000 per "plus"

Ashieran Lance

Many mid-level Ashieran warriors use a specially enchanted pole arm as their primary weapon of choice. The Ashieran lance is an unwieldy flat-bladed pole arm that suffers a -2 penalty to attack and damage when used in melee combat (2-12 hp damage). The bottom of the pole arm appears to have a spear-like point. However, at a mental command of the wielder, the spear tip discharges cold energy that causes 1-8 hp damage to a single target within 30 feet (save vs. spells for no damage). This ability can be used 6/day and is effective underwater as well as in the air.

XP Value: 500

GP Value: 1,000

Coldfire Shield

The Ashiera pose a threat to many coastal towns. In response to that danger, certain druids have created shields specifically designed to protect against the Ashieran coldfire ability. *Coldfire shields* lend a +2 bonus to AC and give the bearer immunity from all cold-based attacks. In addition, the shields are enchanted to absorb energy from the cold-fire attacks of the Ashiera, healing the bearer for 1 hp damage for each hp damage absorbed. The bearer can be healed only to his normal maximum hit points. Any additional points of healing are lost.

XP Value: 1,000

GP Value: 2,500



| | |
|------------------|----------------|
| CLIMATE/TERRAIN: | Any |
| FREQUENCY: | Rare |
| ORGANIZATION: | Community |
| ACTIVITY CYCLE: | Any |
| DIET: | Omnivore |
| INTELLIGENCE: | High |
| TREASURE: | None |
| ALIGNMENT: | Lawful Neutral |

| | |
|-------------------|----------------|
| NO. APPEARING: | 10-40 |
| ARMOR CLASS: | 2 |
| MOVEMENT: | 9, fly 18 (C) |
| HIT DICE: | 3 |
| THACO: | 18 |
| NO. OF ATTACKS: | 1 or 2 |
| DAMAGE/ATTACK: | By weapon type |
| SPECIAL ATTACKS: | Nil |
| SPECIAL DEFENSES: | Nil |
| MAGIC RESISTANCE: | Nil |
| SIZE: | M (6' tall) |
| MORALE: | Fanatic (18) |
| XP VALUE: | 65 |

The Masgai are tall and long-limbed insect humanoids. They walk upright on spindly legs, and their thin arms extend almost to their knees. The outer surface of their entire body is covered by a dark chitinous layer, acting as natural armor plating. Their faces are elongated, with two eyes set wide apart, a prominent jaw, and sharp teeth.

Masgai are highly advanced tool makers, and their clothes are mass produced. While the clothing is of high quality, there is very little variety in fashion, so most Masgai have a uniform appearance. The Masgai do not have wings, as they are distantly related to air elementals and have the innate ability to fly at will.

The Masgai are empire builders who are slowly spreading their influence from world to world. The Masgai's capital city of Rig-Veda is hidden on a remote world, its location jealously guarded by both mundane and magical means.

The Masgai have developed a systematic approach to their dominion of other worlds. They begin by establishing trading enclaves in the most powerful cities of each world, entering into trade alliances that give them both financial and political power. When they determine the time is right, they establish a minor settlement on the edge of the frontier, helping the indigenous races keep any humanoid, giant or monster populations at bay. Once they have been accepted, they slowly increase the size of their settlement until they can challenge for political, economic and military supremacy.

The Masgai are perfectly content to wait for centuries for their plans to come to fruition. They prefer to establish control without military conquest, but they engage in battle without hesitation whenever necessary.

Masgai warriors can advance to an unlimited level as warriors. They have no clerical magic, though, and their wizards can advance only as far as fourth level.

Combat: The Masgai way of life of has created exemplary warriors. They are disciplined in battle, responding flawlessly to a hierarchy of commanders and sub-units. Attacks are coordinated and well-planned. Their assaults

are always carried out for a very specific purpose. The Masgai do not form rigid battle lines or commit themselves irrevocably to attack. They usually approach in a loose, flexible formation, trying to attack opponents at their weakest points. The front ranks of Masgai attackers usually carry 12' spears that are used to thrust at non-flying warriors, and secondary ranks are typically armed with both bows and short swords.

If strongly resisted, the Masgai withdraw, hoping to coerce the enemy into breaking ranks and overextending themselves to counterattack. Once an opponents discipline has broken down, the Masgai mass to attack isolated groups, engaging in melee combat only when the battle is clearly in their favor.

Ecology: The Masgai are an ambitious, powerful race. They plan for the long term and are extremely patient in dealing with other races. Masgai population centers tend to be very large, and they are a great drain on the natural resources of the surrounding lands. The Masgai need to expand their population base due to a short life-span forces them to go farther and farther afield for food and materials. Their largest empires have actually drawn on the resources of numerous worlds, all connected by sophisticated teleportation portals.

The Masgai jealously guard their magical advances, which are centered on group benefits rather than individual applications.

Habitat/Society: Masgai are builders of the highest order. They live in vast cities that are built with magic the Masgai have tamed for domestic use. Since they can fly, they choose sites that are easily defensible and of little value to creatures who can't fly. They use sophisticated agricultural techniques to produce large yields from their fields, and they create immense transportation networks to bring supplies from outlying regions.

War is central to the social structure of the Masgai. A military hierarchy wields economic and political power, and all citizens are expected to serve at least two years in the standing army of each Masgai city. The response of most Masgai warriors to the strain of constant war-making is a fierce adherence to a strict code of honor that stresses personal service to the state above all else. This strict warrior code has led to the establishment of various military orders, membership in which is the measurement of social status in the Masgai hierarchy.

The Masgai wage war as an extension of their political power; they do not waste resources without the prospect of some type of gain. They see conquest as a means to gain riches and power, planning immense campaigns for the annexation and consolidation of power. They are ruthless and terrifying in battle.

Roleplaying Notes

Beyond the surface of their strict adherence to a militaristic society, most Masgai are individualists at heart. Advancement within Masgai society is often based on personal achievement, and one of the fastest ways to rise to the ranks of the powerful is to be either financially or militarily successful outside the borders of the empire. Those individuals able to strike out on their own and make a name for

themselves are rewarded with a heightened position in Masgai society when they return. Those that fail in the outside world, though, fail completely. They are never able to regain their position in Masgai society.

Masgai are quick to make friends and allies; however, most relationships are viewed as temporary conditions that can swiftly change as circumstances change. Masgai are opportunistic and rarely risk themselves personally without the chance of a significant gain. If they perceive a specific goal as worthwhile, though, they pursue it with all the means at their disposal.

Masgai work well with others, and—although arrogant—are quick to grasp and follow orders. They respect power and authority and take pains not to break local laws. When they are given authority themselves, they expect complete obedience and have little patience for dissension and debate.

Masgai player characters find that they are not completely trusted by those who they meet in their travels. First, their alien features clearly set them apart from most demi-humankind, unless they have a means of disguising themselves. Second, most nations are wary of the ambitions of Masgai empires, and often view individual Masgai as advance scouts for possible conquests. Local officials often keep a close eye on the actions of any Masgai once they are identified.

Masgai Magical items

Earth Arrows

Earth arrows are among the most powerful magical items created by the Masgai for battles against other flying races. *Earth arrows* have a +2 attack and damage bonus, and any flying creature hit must make a save vs. spells or lose the ability to fly for three hours. These arrows only affect creatures not using magical means of flying. Because of their power (hitting a flying creature in flight is deadly), earth arrows will never be found in quantities of more than 1-3.

XP Value: 250

GP Value: 750

Cloak of the Masgai

The Masgai have developed enchanted cloaks that are quite common among warriors of the race. The cloaks have two special properties, both tied closely to defense against *earth arrows*. First, the cloak enables the wearer *fly* 1/day for one turn. Also, if the wearer is already flying and loses consciousness, the cloak immediately levitates the wearer, and then slowly lowers him to the ground. The cloaks do not radiate magic until one of their special properties is activated. All *cloaks of the Masgai* are extremely well crafted, if not especially unique in design.

XP Value: 700

GP Value: 1,500

Iberc's Ring

Iberc's Ring allows the wearer to fly at twice the normal speed, regardless of whether the flying ability is innate, natural or magical. The ability can only be used once a day, for up to ten turns. For each turn that the ability is used, the wearer suffers 3 hp damage. When using this ability, the wearer gains a -3 Armor Class bonus.

XP Value: 1,500

GP Value: 3,000





The Elves of the Dusk

by Roger Raupp, with Chris Perkins and Jesse Decker

illustrated by Dennis Kauth

THE DWARVES HAD KNOWN about the substance for ages, its mere existence no great surprise. Rather, it was the drow's ingenious use of it that was so startling.

The dwarves were the first to unearth the mineral that the drow later named uhl (pronounced OO-ul, meaning "vaporous" or "airy"). Superficially similar to umber, uhl's relative abundance, milkier translucency, and soft consistency spoil its use as a gemstone of any significant value. Before the drow discovered its extraordinary qualities, the dwarves usually destroyed uhl veins in order to create tunnels and caverns, taking full advantage of one of this mineral's lesser characteristics: common acids vaporize uhl completely.

The duergar found that uhl made a pleasant incense, and their priests would burn small chunks on charcoal embers. Those who have tried this for themselves claim that the odor is like that of copal mixed with burning pitch. The duergar priests attributed mystical properties to uhl incense. Besides causing slight euphoria (or nausea), the substance is said to induce prophetic visions from the duergar's corrupt deities. (Surface-dwelling critics of the duergar note that the gray dwarves could probably achieve the same effect by strangling themselves.)

Eventually, the drow learned of uhl from the duergar. The clan Xak'Vandiri had regular contact with the gray dwarves. On one particular occasion, a priestess, one Panque (PAN-kay), took interest in the spectacular claims of the duergar peddlers. They claimed to have a rare and powerful new incense. Usually, Panque ignored such base dealings, but this time her curiosity overpowered her sense of propriety. She purchased a sample of the duergar's orange pebbles, swearing to exact a most unpleasant revenge if the incense wasn't all they claimed.

As the legend has it, the censers were lit in Lolth's temple. Uhl smoke issued forth. Panque breathed it in deeply, pronouncing

her unholy prayers for conquest and supremacy for the Xak'Vandiri clan. She tumbled to the altar, numbed by the uhl. When she finally rose to her feet, it was with an infernal mission.

The spider goddess had appeared to Panque and charged the priestess with a quest. Centermost in this plan was the uhl. It was to be employed to carry House Xak'Vandiri aloft and forward on the winds, like some fearsome aerial predator-like young arachnids leaving their mothers web.

Panque's vision was to embark the Xak'Vandiri clan on a course that would span more than a century and finally result in the "Xan Kraban"—the drow windship. Initially the clan matrons greeted Panque's vision-inspired objectives with skepticism. The tale relates that she invoked the wrath of Lolth on her critics and won their support by demonstrating the buoyant power of vaporized uhl by lofting an uhl-filled bladder before their doubting eyes. Convinced at last of Panque's divine guidance, the matrons set her plans as the highest ambition of the clan. The windships would be built, and the Xak'Vandiri would venture into the open sky, gaining great wealth and prestige.

Immediately, drow warlords were dispatched into the dwarven reaches of the Underdark to ensure a steady supply of uhl. Pacts were sealed with the duergar, and regular shipments were assured. It wasn't long before uhl stockpile began to mount in the Xak'Vandiri's subterranean holdings.

Meanwhile, artisans were set to the task of engineering Panque's Windship. They worked for many years, submitting design after design for Panque's approval. "When you have fulfilled Lolth's wishes, you shall know. Back to your sites, you unworthy slugs!" And so it went.

The craft could not be a simple bladder filled with uhl vapor, though such a device was easy to construct. It had to be a vessel that could ply the winds, not merely drift at their mercy.



The scope of Panque Xak'Vandiri's grand scheme would not be limited to the invention of a flying ship. A special crew was required, one that could withstand the sunlight and the elements of the surface world. Such a crew would not be easy to recruit or train. Who among the drow could rise to such a task? And which among their allies could they trust with such a bold charge?

Although they could only grudgingly admit it, and then only among themselves, the Xak'Vandiri realized that they were confronted by their greatest weakness, with no reasonable solution in sight. How could they overcome the sun itself? In time, Panque hit upon an idea that was, even to the drow themselves, almost unthinkable.

Raiding parties were sent to the surface, their objective to attack a number of sylvan hamlets and slaughter all of the elves, except the young females. The drow succeeded in their goal. Five communities of wood elves succumbed to the drow onslaught. To this day, the ruins of Amon Laur and Taur Galen bear cruel testimony to the drow victories.

The raiders returned to the Underdark with a score of captive wood elves. These unfortunates were made the concubines of favored lords among the drow, and from their unholy unions were spawned halfbreed drow, known as the Xakhun (pronounced za-KOON).

Those halfbreeds who proved strong became the pride of the clan. Those who were weak found their destinies on the altars of the spider goddess. The blood of their surface-born mothers could be tolerated only insofar as it helped House Xak'Vandiri achieve its divine mission. Either they would learn to lead the drow into the air, or they would be sacrificed on Lolth's altars. To this day, the Xakhun windshippers say, "Sail the winds or stain the stone," echoing the aphorisms of their cruel trainers.

When the hybrid offspring came of age, the drow sent them to the surface world to test their strengths. The drow had no ships constructed yet, nor did any have experience flying. They needed to learn about sailing and the arts of navigation from those who sailed the surface seas. Already they had contacts among the mercenary corsairs of the nearby coast. Now they placed their special youngsters in service with the pirates, enlisting them to absorb all the knowledge they could. Once their education was complete, they were to return to the underworld and prepare for the day of ascent—but not all of them did.

As careful as the clan had been, subjecting the children to the most intense indoctrination, in some of these halfbreeds their mothers nature could not be overshadowed. Despite decades of discipline and conditioning—or perhaps because of the cruel disdain with which the "truebloods" treated the halfbreeds—a handful defected, rebuking the clan and freeing into the surface world. Nothing could have enraged the drow more. These were traitors among their own kin. The matrons dispatched assassins and swore that each and every one of the renegades would be hunted down, captured, and tortured to death.

It was one such renegade windshipper who brought this sordid tale of the Xakhun windshippers to the surface folk.

It's all history now. Many folk have seen those damnable contraptions scooting just above the treetops in the night, or high among the clouds in the day. The cave-crawling drow are bad enough, but now we have them scooting all over the place overhead, too. House Xak'Vandiri has all but abandoned subterranean life. The first halfbreeds have themselves had children, even great grandchildren. You might as well not call them drow anymore; they're a breed apart. Almost all of them are windshippers these days, except for the ancient among them. From what the adventurers who have run into them say, they're an arrogant lot, even those who have turned from Lolth to Eilistraee. My advice to you is, when you see those sails with the big red spiders on them, just turn and run.

The Xakhun

The Xakhun of House Xak'Vandiri are part drow, part wood elf, yet divorced from each of their parent races. Generations of selective breeding have created a type born to serve a specific purpose—to sail the Xan Kraban. Although others have since managed to steal the Xakhun's secret, none match the skill or devotion of the windshippers. To the Xakhun, nothing is more precious than being selected to serve aboard a windship. Xan Kraban captains, or skymistresses, hold the most privileged positions in their clans. To fly is a young Xakhun's highest aspiration, yet only the most talented are chosen for that duty.

Unlike full-blooded drow, the Xakhun have no aversion to sunlight or bright illumination. However, they

have lost all of the magical abilities of the drow, except that they retain a partial (10%) magic resistance as a result of their dark elf heritage. Unlike true drow, the Xakhun halfbreeds do not gain additional magic resistance as they advance in level.

For special abilities and class level limits, treat Xakhun halfbreeds in all other respects as wood elves.

Xakhun may be Warriors, Rogues, Wizards, or Priests. Multi-classed Xakhun may combine any of the four primary classes. All Xakhun windshippers take one of the following kits. At the DM's discretion, Xakhun PCs may adopt other kits or take no kit at all.

Windsailors (Warrior or Rogue)

Description: Windsailors form the bulk of Xan Kraban crews. They are trained in the operations of the airship and in combat. Xakhun Warriors or Rogues may choose the windsailor kit, provided they meet the minimum ability requirements. Windsailors fill the highest echelons of Xakhun society, below only the clergy of Lolth and higher-ranking windsailors.

Physically, windsailors tend to be slight and swift. Agility means more than brute strength on the constantly shifting deck of a Xan Kraban, and good windsailors are seldom large.

Windsailor Warriors form the main assault force of windships, adept at both missile and melee combat.

Windsailor Rogues are experts at dropping to the ground on a cord of spider silk, looting the villages of the Xan Kraban's victims before burning the villages to the ground.

Role: Windsailors are responsible for all operations of the Xan Kraban. When not serving on board a Xan Kraban, windsailors often lead small Xakhun raiding parties on the surface.

Their elite status makes most windsailors aloof and serious. Outsiders, even other drow, consider the windsailors the worst of an already haughty people. The knowledge that they were chosen to carry out Lolth's quest makes every member of a Xan Kraban's crew look down on those who were not so honored.

Requirements: Every Xakhun selected to serve on a Xak Kraban must have a minimum Dexterity of 15. In addition, preference is given to those slighter in stature than most. Most experienced windsailors are below average height and weight.

New Proficiency

Pilot Airship

(1 slot Dexterity -3)

This proficiency covers all aspects of flying a Xan Kraban. Characters with this proficiency can serve as competent crewmembers, steer the ship, and know how to maintain the level of uhl gas in the ship. This proficiency does not provide the benefits of the rope use or navigation proficiencies, which are also useful to windsailors.

Weapon Proficiencies: *Required:* Dagger, short bow (composite).

Non-weapon Proficiencies: *Bonus:* Pilot airship (see sidebar). *Recommended:* Navigation, rope use, weather sense.

Special Benefits: The extensive training windsailors receive aboard a Xan Kraban negates any penalties they might otherwise receive due to firing missiles from an unstable platform.

As part of the final stage of their training, windsailors learn to move swiftly along the spidersilk rigging of a Xan Kraban. Any windsailor moving through familiar rigging moves at half his movement rate with no penalty. It takes roughly two hours for a windsailor to become familiar with the rigging of a new airship. This benefit extends to the webbing used by drop spiders, allowing crew members to slip down on unsuspecting prey along with the spiders.

Special Hindrances: Because of the inherent weight restrictions aboard the Xan Kraban, windsailors may not wear anything heavier than leather armor. Although they are allowed to train with any weapon permitted to their class, Xhakun windsailors may not carry any weapons other than daggers and short bows while aboard a Xan Kraban.

Spidermaidens (Priestess)

These priestesses of Lolth are feared for their ability to command the spiders that ride on the Xan Kraban. Spidermaidens devote their lives to the worship of Lolth, as do other drow priestesses. However, instead of leading the rest of the tribe, spidermaidens spend their time among the spiders that help on the flying ships.

Only priestesses of Lolth can be spidermaidens. Xhakun who abandon their faith in Lolth, and those who turn

to Eilistraee for guidance and spells, cannot become spidermaidens.

Spidermaidens often ascend to captain their own vessels, but the majority of them know that they can only do so by handling the spiders with skill.

All spidermaidens learn to train and handle the giant spider-riggers. However, each must choose whether to train leaping sword spiders or drop spiders. Rivalry within the Xakhun most often occurs between those who favor the leaping sword spiders and those who favor the drop spiders.

Role: The primary responsibility of a spidermaiden is the care of the spiders on a Xan Kraban. A dedicated spidermaiden who serves Lolth well often becomes a skymistress—captain of her own airship. In combat, the spidermaiden is responsible for coordinating the spiders' actions with those of the normal crew.

Requirements: Dexterity 15 and Wisdom 15.

Weapon Proficiencies: *Required:* Dagger, short bow.

Non-weapon Proficiencies: *Bonus:* Animal handling (spider). *Recommended:* Pilot airship (see sidebar), navigation, weather sense, rope use.

Special Benefits: Because of their affinity for spiders and devotion to Lolth, skymistresses may move along spider webs at their normal movement rate in any direction. For this power to function, the webs must be strong enough to support the spidermaiden's weight without breaking. Furthermore, spidermaidens are completely immune to adhesives of all kinds. *Web* spells, *sovereign glue*, and other adhesives have no effect on a spidermaiden.

At 3rd level, spidermaidens may cast a specialized form of *speak with animals* (spiders only) at will.

Special Hindrances: Spidermaidens are linked with the rigger-spider of their ship as a wizard is linked with her familiar. Although a spidermaiden gains little from this link, should her rigger-spider be killed, she suffers dire side effects. A rigger-spider that dies due to age always leaves a clutch of eggs, one of which matures into a new rigger. If her rigger-spider dies without leaving the proper clutch of eggs, a spidermaiden must make a successful system shock roll or permanently lose half her hit points. Even if this save succeeds, the spidermaiden loses a point of Constitution permanently. A *restoration* spell counters this loss.

Windtamer (Wizard)

Windtamers are mages trained to integrate their magic with the operations of a windship. They are the only members of the crew not expected to participate in the day-to-day operation of the airship. Instead, they serve as navigators and use their magical abilities to aid the rest of the crew. Windtamers come from every level of Xakhun society; there are simply too few who inherit the drow's magical abilities for it to be any other way.

There is one windtamer aboard a windship. Rarely, he will be accompanied by an apprentice (15% chance).

Role: Windtamers keep much of their magic in reserve in case the ship itself is in danger. The Windtamers' ability to maneuver a Xan Kraban makes them fearsome opponents.

On board, Windtamers often act as the first mate and helmsman.

Preferred Schools: Alteration, Enchantment/Charm, Gr. Divination, Illusion.

Barred Schools: Windtamers can not cast spells from the schools of Conjuraction/Summoning or Necromancy, regardless of which schools they choose to specialize in.

Requirements: Windtamers must have an Intelligence of 15 or better, and like all windsailors, a Dexterity of at least 15.

Weapon Proficiencies: *Required:* Dagger

Non-weapon Proficiencies: *Bonus:* Navigation. (Windtamers receive a +1 bonus to all Navigation proficiency checks.) *Required:* Pilot airship.

Special Benefits: Unlike most of the Xakhun, Windtamers have not lost the affinity for magic typical of their drow heritage. Once per day, a windtamer may *levitate* as the normal drow ability.

At 3rd level, windtamers gain the ability to cast *feather fall* once per day.

At 5th level, windtamers gain the ability to cast *fly* on themselves once per day.

At 12th level, windtamers can cast *wind walk* once per day.

Windtamers may move through the rigging of a Xan Kraban at half their movement rate with no penalty.

Special Hindrances: Windtamers spell restrictions are noted above (see **Barred Schools**). Further, they lack the ability to cast an additional spell of each level like other specialist mages.

The Xan Kraban

Ship's Hull

The windship's hull is founded on an immense central beam that runs the entire length of the vessel, emerging at the prow as the main foremast. This beam is hewn from a single, immense, rigidly straight conifer, a type found only in certain forests of the surface world. The hull's width and volume are established by a series of spars lashed perpendicularly along the central beam. Their varying length provides the hull's basic fore and aft taper, each group supporting the fundamental hexagonal shape. These spars are split from the stalks of tall sturdy toadstools commonly found in the Underdark. They provide a skeletal framing that is light yet very strong.

Sinew cables or, more rarely, giant spider webbing stretches from spar-tip to spar-tip along the length of the hull and around its cross-section. This structural rigging completes the basic dimensions of the windship's hull and insures proper rigidity. Over the framework of spars and cables a membrane is tightly stretched. This membrane is a patchwork of thousands of finely-scraped hides stitched together and invested with a special sort of pitch. This material looks very much like vellum but is far stronger—resisting puncture as if it were much thicker leather. It does not burn as readily as vellum or typical sail cloth—again demonstrating qualities similar to leather. Much of the membrane's resiliency can be attributed to the pitch-like medium with which it is saturated. Macabre rumor has it that the Xakhun strip the hides for their windships from the bodies of unfortunate surface folk. There is also a story that the pitch-like coating around the windship's membrane is actually secreted by a rare form of subterranean spider cultivated by the Xakhun.

Interior Compartments

The volume within the hull is taken up by a crew compartment, travel conduits (ladder chutes) and the uhl gas hold. The areas frequented by personnel—the crew compartment and ladder chutes—are sealed from the gas hold by the same membranous material that covers the vessel's exterior. Though enshrouded in membrane, the inner bulkheads are framed with slats

of toadstool timber, loosely woven and lashed together. The ladder, railings, hatches and mechanisms are also constructed out of toadstool timber and lashed together with sinew cable or spider webbing when necessary.

Sails

For the sails the Xakhun shipwrights borrowed a weave from their human corsair allies. The pirates call this particular canvas their "moonraker" sail and claim it can catch even the slightest breeze. The windshippers found the material well-suited to their needs and learned to manufacture a variant of the canvas, enhancing some of its qualities. It must be noted that the Xakhun now trade their special sail cloth for handsome fees. The same corsairs from whom the Xakhun derived their own brand of moonraker sail now value the windshippers' canvas more than their own. Xakhun sail cloth can, on rare occasion, be found in coastal black markets but costs many times that of regular nautical canvas.

The windship has two square-type main sails that hang from a spliced yardarm off the forward projecting main mast, functioning like huge spritsails. They gather most of the vessel's wind. A mizzen sail flies from a mast erected amidship on the spine. This sail is fitted with battens after an oriental design. All of the ship's rigging makes use of the same sinew cable or spider webbing used throughout the vessel's construction.

Rigging & Oars

A windship's rigging is maintained by one or more specially-trained giant spiders. These creatures are trained by the Xakhun and can rapidly repair damage to all parts of the windship—including punctures to the outer membrane—with their adhesive webs. When not tightening or replacing the rigging, the spider-rigger usually attaches itself to some discreet portion of the hull until needed.

Amidship, along both sides of the windship, project three oar-like paddles. These too are manufactured from toadstool timber. Inside the hull, they are connected to an ingenious crossbow mechanism. The opposite ends are splayed, bent, lashed and fitted with spider webbing (or a webbing of sail cloth). The crossbow machinery, set firmly amidship on the vessel's central beam and mizzen mast, allows a

Xakhun Windship

Length: 185 feet (average)

Beam: 40 feet (average)

Size Classification: Very large

Cost: 150,000 gp (sold among Xakhun only)

Building Time: 1d2+2 months

Hull/Crippling Points: 36/36

Crew: Maximum: 12

Average: 8-9

Minimum: 6

Cargo Capacity: 1,800 lbs.

Standard Uhl Supply: 500 lbs.

Movement Rate: 18

Skyworthiness: 9

Pursuit: 1d6+6

Maneuverability?

With sails and oars: 1d6+6

With sails only: 1d6+3

With oars only: 1d6+1

1. The amount of damage that the hull of the windship can withstand is determined by its hull points. Crippling damage, on the other hand, refers to strikes against a ship's masts, rigging and oars and primarily affects maneuverability. See "Chapter 4: Nautical Combat" (*Of Ships and the Sea*/52-53) for details.

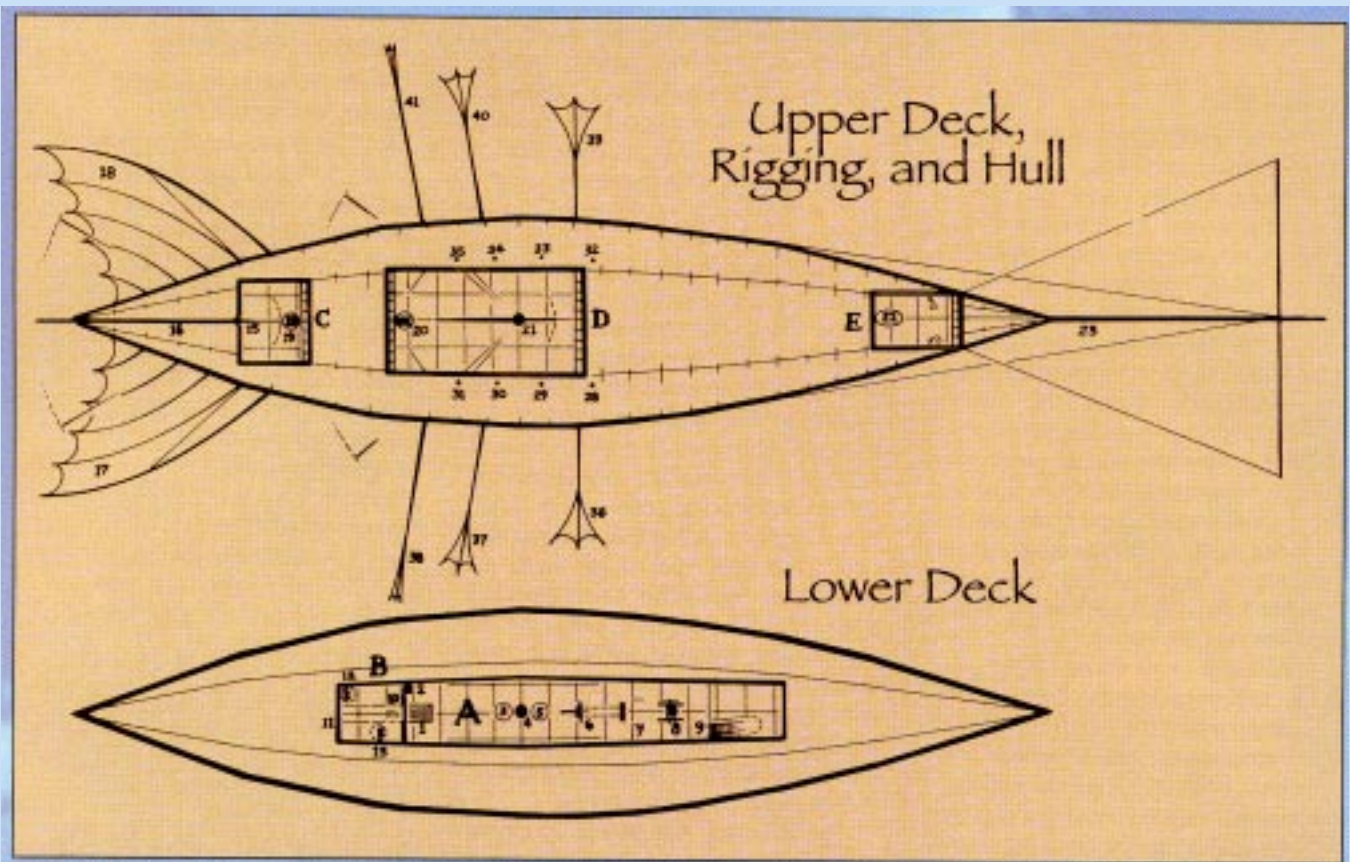
2. See "Chapter 2: Nautical Travel" in *OSAS* for information on movement rates. Even with their oars, windships cannot move without their sails. The windship's Skyworthiness represents the stability and durability of the vessel in adverse flying conditions; otherwise, it is similar to the Seaworthiness of nautical ships.

3. Pursuit represents the windship's ability to use its speed to catch airborne and air-sea vessels. The ship's pursuit rating comes into play during the Maneuvering Phase of ship-to-ship combat when the distance between the ships is large enough that subtle maneuvers have little meaning. (See "Movement & Combat" for details.) A windship's pursuit rating equals 1d6 plus one-third its current movement rate.

4. A windship's maneuverability comes into play during the Maneuvering Phase of nautical combat. (See "Chapter 4: Nautical Combat" in *OSAS* and the "Movement & Combat" section of this article.)

single windshipper to handle all six of the oars at once. Each oar is linked to this double-bowed mechanism by means of a pivoting connector. Sinew cables or tightly-woven web strands are connected to those pivots that run through the crew compartment and enable the oarsman to make certain adjustments. Each oar can have its paddle set from a vertical position (or "full chop") to a horizontal position (or "no chop")—in other words, from an effective stroke to an ineffective stroke and any degree in between. In operation, this allows the solitary windshipper to direct the force of the oars, in conjunction with the rudder and sails, to assist in maneuvering the windship.

The windship's aft is mounted with tail-vanes, port and starboard, and a



rudder. All are constructed much like the mizzen sail, with canvas and battens, but are more rigid. The rudder resembles the tail-vanes but is set on a vertical, pivoting mast and has a stay running along its bottom parallel to the hull, whereas the rudders battens stretch into the hull and are firmly lashed to the ship's central beam. The vanes and rudder hold the windship's lateral course, with the rudder further complementing the sails and oars in maneuvers.

Decks & Landing Skids

All surfaces aboard the windship that are subject to travel—the crew compartment in the lower deck, the quarter deck, poop deck, upper deck and forecastle—are floored with toadstool timber planking woven together with adhesive webbing. Though quite strong for its mass, the planking is generally only about half an inch thick. Large or heavily encumbered creatures who are not cautious could easily break through the decking and rupture the hull's membrane. Beneath the lower deck, the hull would open to the outside and below, perhaps dropping someone through the decking and to the ground. Other locations are likely to open into the gas hold, and

the consequences of entering there are detailed in area F (page 40).

Mounted along the windship's "keel" are landing skids. These, too, are constructed of lightweight toadstool timbers. The flexible nature of the wood allows it to absorb a certain amount of impact on landing or contact with other flying objects. The skids can easily withstand most normal "touch downs," but they are typically the first parts of the ship to crumble when crash damage occurs.

Deck Plan

General areas of activity aboard a Xakhun windship are denoted by letters. Specific details are marked by numbers.

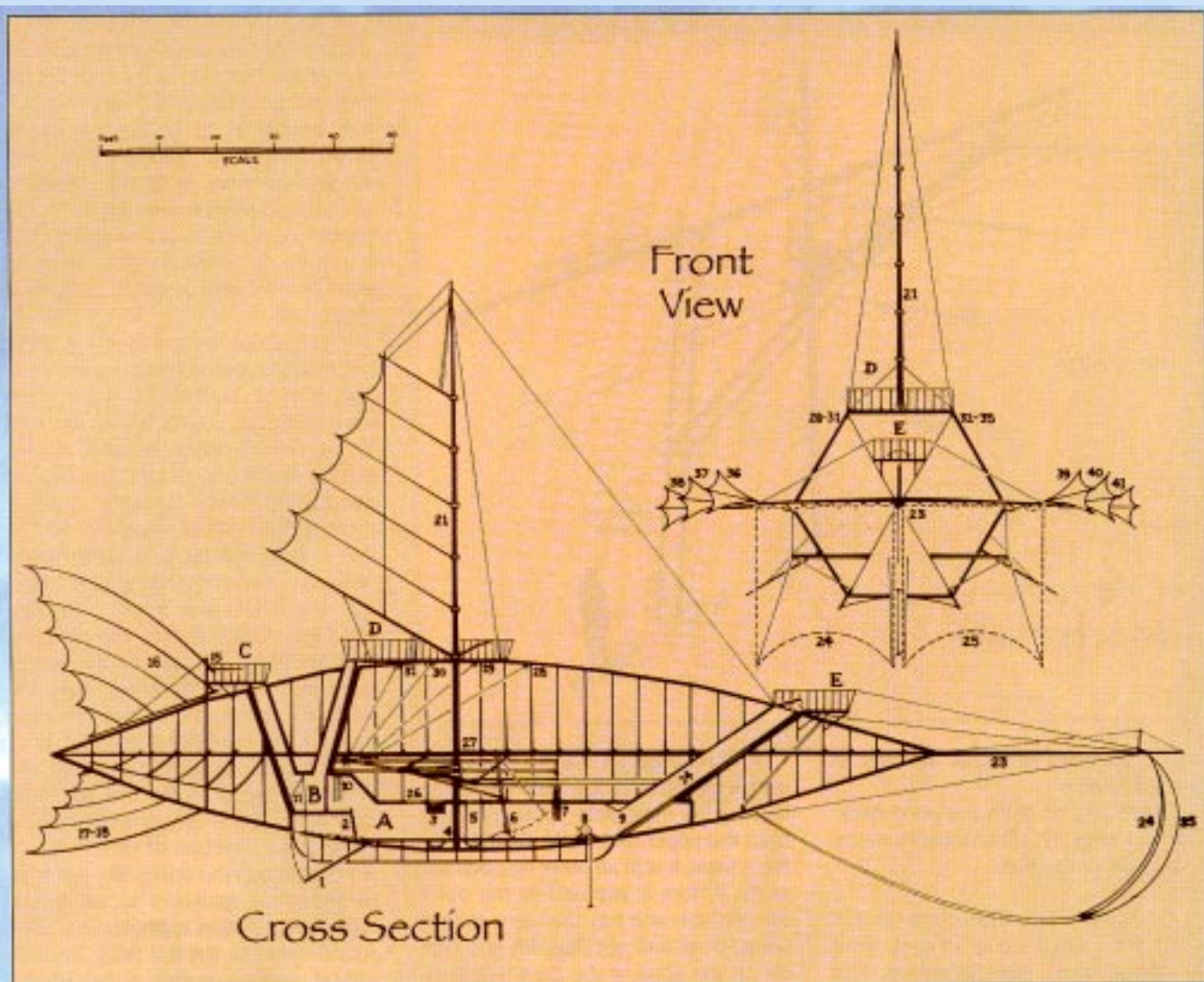
A. Lower Deck. This area is set amid the bowels of the ship, along what may be considered the keel. If the planks of the deck are pried up, the outer membrane of the hull will be exposed below. The compartments bulkheads are covered and sealed with membrane, effectively separating the area from the gas hold that surrounds it above and around, but not below. Hanging along the bulkheads, lashed high near the ceiling, are sacks containing the ship's uhl supply and

spare coils of web-spun rope (or, in lieu of such finery, ropes of tightly bound hemp).

To the fore and aft of this compartment, the deck is inclined to follow the contours of the hull. These areas are considered the orlop decks. The aft orlop deck is bisected by a gang plank (1). The orlop decks are used by resting crew members. Six webbed or netted hammocks hang from the wails—three fore, three aft. They are strung from bulkhead to bulkhead when needed. What few belongings the crew members are allowed (and not carried on their persons) are likely to be stowed somewhere about the orlop decks. Booty or captives are also stowed here, wrapped tightly in spider webbing. Windships that do not have spider-riggers also carry patching kits for sealing punctures in the vessel's membranes; they are also stored here.

Next to the gang plank (1), to the port side and immediately in front of the aft orlop deck, is a ladder (2) that allows access to the quarter deck (area B).

Set centrally amid the deck, fore and aft of the mizzen post (4), are the two uhl vaporizing basins (3,5). These receptacles are thin copper bowls



about two feet in diameter. Their rims are set flush to the decking, and stretched over each bowl is a flexible membranous hood that can be drawn down over the basins to channel the vapors into the gas hold (area F).

Set fore of the basins is the lever (6) for "cocking" the oar-driving mechanism. On the deck, at the lever's fully engaged position, is a bowed spring-hook that holds the system until the moment of the oars' release. The system is actuated by depressing the spring-hook mechanism.

To either side of the lever, dangling through sealed outlets in the ceiling, are control cables (7) for setting the angle of the oars. There are three to port and three to starboard—one for each oar.

Just before the fore orlop deck lies a winch mechanism (8). It is wound with two hundred feet of web or sinew cable that runs out through a hole in the decking to a large grapple

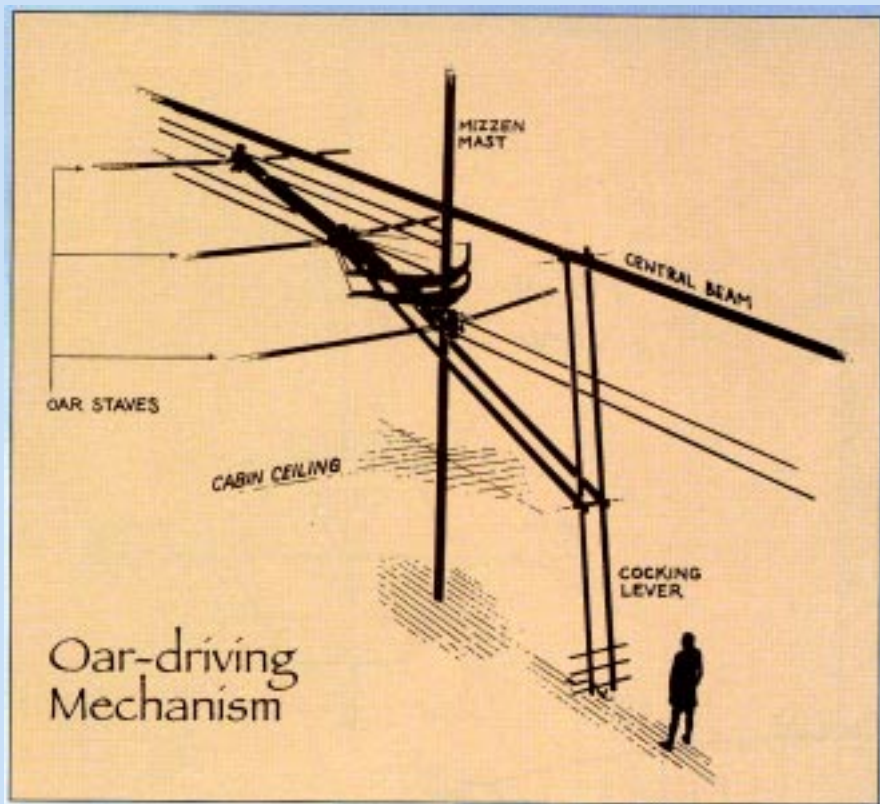
hook below. This serves as the vessel's brake and anchor. At the very front of the compartment is an access portal (9) to the ladder shoot (14) that leads up to the forecabin (area E).

When the windship is in full flight, one crew member is normally stationed in the lower deck compartment—the oarsman. This crewmember operates the cocking lever and oar control cables. During the initial phase of windship ascent, the whole crew is normally occupied vaporizing the uhl to generate lift.

B. Quarter Deck. Overlooking the lower deck, above the aft orlop deck and gang plank and connected to the crew compartment, lies the quarter deck. In the middle, hanging from the ceiling above the very fore of the deck, are eight vent trip cables (10) used to release the uhl gas and initiate controlled descent. A pulley is located centrally on the ceiling; a line runs

through it, secured to the aft bulkhead. This block-and-tackle configuration (11) raises and lowers the gang plank (1). Two ladders rise from the quarter deck up into chutes (12,13) that lead to the poop deck (area C) and the upper deck (area D). Generally, when the windship is under way, this is where the captain is situated.

C. Poop Deck. A ladder chute (12) from the quarter deck (area B) emerges onto this area by means of a 3' diameter portal (19) set amid the decks forward edge. This rear-most of all the decks is completely open to the air and enclosed by a 3' high railing of toadstool timber reinforced with web strands. Centered amid the aft of the poop deck is the tiller (15)—a wooden appendage attached to the rudder vane (16) and used to swing it from side to side. The tiller is held by the helmsman (often the first mate), but there is a rope hitch set on the aft



railing designed to secure the tiller to a fixed position.

Down and aft from the poop deck, the tail vanes (17,18) emerge from the underside of the hull.

D. Upper Deck. The other ladder chute (13) from the quarter deck (area B) opens on to the centermost and largest of the outer decks through a 3' diameter portal (20) set amid the aft edge of the deck. This deck is exposed to the open air and surrounded by a 3' high railing. Central to the deck and slightly forward stands the mizzen mast and its sail (21) like a huge dorsal fin. Running up the mast and tied to the deck are support and control lines made of thick spider webbing (cast by the windship's spider-rigger), rope, or tightly-wound animal sinew. Special T-shaped pins are used to fasten the lines to their best advantage. These wooden pegs are inserted through holes set all along the decks perimeter, and the railings can be removed or placed as needed. Complimenting these unusual T-pegs are small spindles set on top of the railings. These provide leverage, like pulleys, allowing the sailors to amplify their strength when hauling lines. Two windshippers are usually on duty tending the mizzen sail.

E. Forecastle. This deck is mounted above the prow of the windship, overlooking the main sails. Though smaller than the upper deck (area D) and lacking a mast, it is in all other respects the same. It, too, is exposed to the outer atmosphere and has the same railing with T-pegs and spindles. Aft and center on the edge of the deck is a toadstool timber hatch (22) that covers the ladder chute (14) from the lower deck compartment (area A). A number of control lines are rigged to the main sails from this location. Some of the lines stretch directly from the main mast to their forecastle anchor-points, while certain others emerge from below deck through conduits. When the main sails are billowed and the ship is under way, two windshippers will be on duty upon the forecastle. The windship's spider-rigger could also be "stationed" here.

Projecting horizontally from the prow is the huge needle-nose of the windship—the main mast (23). Some thirty-five feet out from the hull, a lengthy spliced yard arm spans the main mast, suspending the mail sails (24, 25). Each sail measures approximately 20 feet square. Besides the sails' control lines, many support cables run from the main mast and its yard arm to anchor points all about the vessel's prow.

F. Gas Hold. Most of the windship's volume is reserved for the lift-providing uhl vapor. The only means of access into the gas hold is a two-and-a-half foot slit (26) in the ceiling membrane of the lower deck compartment (area A). This aperture is barely apparent, almost completely blending into the membrane's patchwork of seams. It is a simple gummed incision, used in emergencies and released only with great care.

Once within the gas hold, the ship's skeletal frame dominates one's view. The interior portion of the mizzen mast stands amidship, lashed securely to the central beam. Mounted to the central beam and mizzen mast is the oar-driving double-crossbow mechanism (27)—a strange puzzle of sliding levers, bow strings, and guide poles. Amidship, along the ceiling of the hold but just below the upper deck, are eight gas vents (28-35), four port and four starboard. These are the valves used to release uhl vapor from the hold. A control line runs from each vent to the trips (10) that hang from the ceiling of the quarter deck (area B).

Windshippers enter the gas hold only when it is empty or when they're under the protection of certain spells. An individual who enters the gas hold or somehow manages to fall into it while it is full risks asphyxiation. Each round spent in the full hold, an individual must make a successful Constitution check, with a cumulative -1 penalty each round, or fail unconscious. Once unconscious, the victim suffers 1 hp damage each round so long as he or she remains in the oxygen-depleted area. Of course, spells and magic items may negate the asphyxiation.

Windship Operation

The Xakhun windships, or Xan Kraban, cannot carry huge payloads and are too fragile for open warfare, but they afford the Xakhun pirates and privateers (and others who would follow them) a stealthy means of traversing the airways beyond the reach of most enemies. Above or among the clouds, a windship can range far and wide, penetrating border defenses and avoiding sight.

The routes travelled by the windships are largely determined by prevailing wind currents. The Xakhun have spent a great deal of time and effort charting the upper atmosphere

and are careful to note the characteristics of unexplored “aerotory.” Xakhun navigators have at their disposal the finest collection of aerial information available. The Xan Kraban captains (called Skymistresses) are among the finest pilots. They set their courses without the aid of instrumentation, relying on superb recognition of cloud formations, lunar motions, and star positions instead.

Years of flight have worn a peculiar pattern upon the travel of windships—a pattern formed by necessity and efficiency. During the day, a windship is piloted high in the atmosphere. As night approaches, the Xakhun allow their vessels to drift down as they inevitably lose some of their gas. Just after darkness falls, they may have drifted down as low as a few hundred feet above the surface. Then they begin to counter their descent by replenishing their gas hold. All through the night, until the last hours before dusk, they’ll maintain a healthy altitude until the threat of morning light propels them to initiate ascent. When the breeze is steady, they sometimes skim just above the tree tops, watchful for the campfires of would-be victims. However, any truly dangerous threat will send them quickly aloft. The entire course of a windship’s flight appears as an ongoing waveform-up and down, day and night.

Windships do not carry large reserves of food, and their supplies need replenishing on a regular basis. With a proper margin of safety, hunters and raiding parties are dispatched with the greatest stealth to waylay the unsuspecting or bring down game. Such parties are typically accompanied by leaping sword spiders or drop spiders trained to hunt and track prey. (See “Spider, Xakhun” for details.) The Xakhun prefer to take rations and booty over fresh animal kills. Prisoners are taken only as space dictates, and then only if their capture has a chance of yielding some greater reward.

Ship Ascent

Ascent is achieved by vaporizing uhl into the windship’s gas hold. Uhl pellets are carefully measured out of storage sacks that hang from the bulkheads and placed in the “steaming” basins of the lower deck. Approximately five pounds of uhl is required each day, on average, to

hold the vessel aloft. Windship transporting heavier loads require more of the substance. Of course, even greater quantities are needed to completely fill the hold if it is empty.

Once the uhl has been placed in the basins, it must be saturated with special acidic fluids that the windshippers commonly carry. The drenching triggers a chemical reaction, dissolving the uhl pellets into a gaseous form. Hoods are immediately drawn around the basins, trapping the gas and channeling it into the windship’s hold. When the gas in the hold is dense enough to counter the weight of the vessel, its crew and its payload, all begin to rise.

Ship Descent

Descent is a simple matter of losing the uhl gas. To a certain extent, this is unavoidable. As meticulous as the Xakhun shipwrights are, there are always small leaks in a windship’s membrane. Windshippers are constantly vigilant in detecting of uhl leakage—always attentive to the smallest scent and ready to seal the source, but that only stabilizes a constant process as new leaks occur. As often as possible, loss of altitude is timed to coincide with the inevitable loss of gas. When this is simply not possible, the captain may elect to use the gas hold’s release vents. These valves are used sparingly and with extreme care. Any gas released in this manner requires an additional expenditure of the ship’s limited uhl supply to reestablish proper buoyancy. Only the captain or, failing her presence, the highest-ranking crew member, has command over the release vents. Unauthorized tampering is dealt with quickly and severely. Discipline aboard a Xakhun windship is swift, merciless, and attributable to the Xakhun’s fearsome efficiency.

Maneuverability

A windship is maneuvered through the precise choreography of its rudder vane, oars, and sails. Each is synchronized with the others to achieve the desired course alteration. The Xakhun windshippers are highly skilled with the windship’s systems; attempts by untrained crewmen to maneuver the vessel result in -5 penalties to proficiency checks and success rolls.

In preparation for a maneuver, the oarsman on the lower deck pushes the

cocking lever into its “engaged” position and hooks it there. He then sets the plane of each oar for the effectiveness of its stroke according to the captain’s orders. With the oars set and ready, the captain (standing on the quarter deck) commands her crew on the outer decks via the ladder chutes. The windshippers tending the mizzen sail transmit orders to the crew members on the forecastle. The captain, or her stand-in, has the vital role of timing and coordinating the crew’s efforts.

Next to the captain, the most vital “player” in guiding the windship is the windship’s spider-rigger. This giant spider follows the commands of the spidermaiden and is trained to adjust the ship’s rigging-and spin new rigging, where required—at a moment’s notice. It moves swiftly across every surface of the vessel, ensuring that the control lines remain taut, untangled and secure.

Lighting

The Xakhun do not make use of any sort of artificial lighting. At night, the ship’s interior is almost pitch dark. During the day, the interior is a murky brownish-gray, as some light filters in through the membranes. Xakhun windshippers have 120’ infravision, enabling them to negotiate the windship in the darkest conditions. Their lithe, limber forms allow them to maneuver on deck despite the windship’s delicate construction, unlike blind clods whose clumsy missteps are likely to destroy bulkheads and tear membranes.

Ports of Call

Xan Kraban landing sites tend to be high altitude, mountainous locations or plateaus leveled into precipitous escarpments. These bases are always positioned along the least accessible peaks available. All factors are surveyed: There must be a high degree of privacy, advantageous winds, access to subterranean tunnel complexes, and defensible positions. Since the Xakhun often enlist the services of duergar miners to excavate uhl deposits, these “ports of call” often lie near duergar enclaves.

Among the more prominent “ports” is Khallyntas, a rocky spire honeycombed with tunnels that spiral downward into the Underdark and lead to vast uhl deposits, all mined by Xakhun slaves put to task by derro.

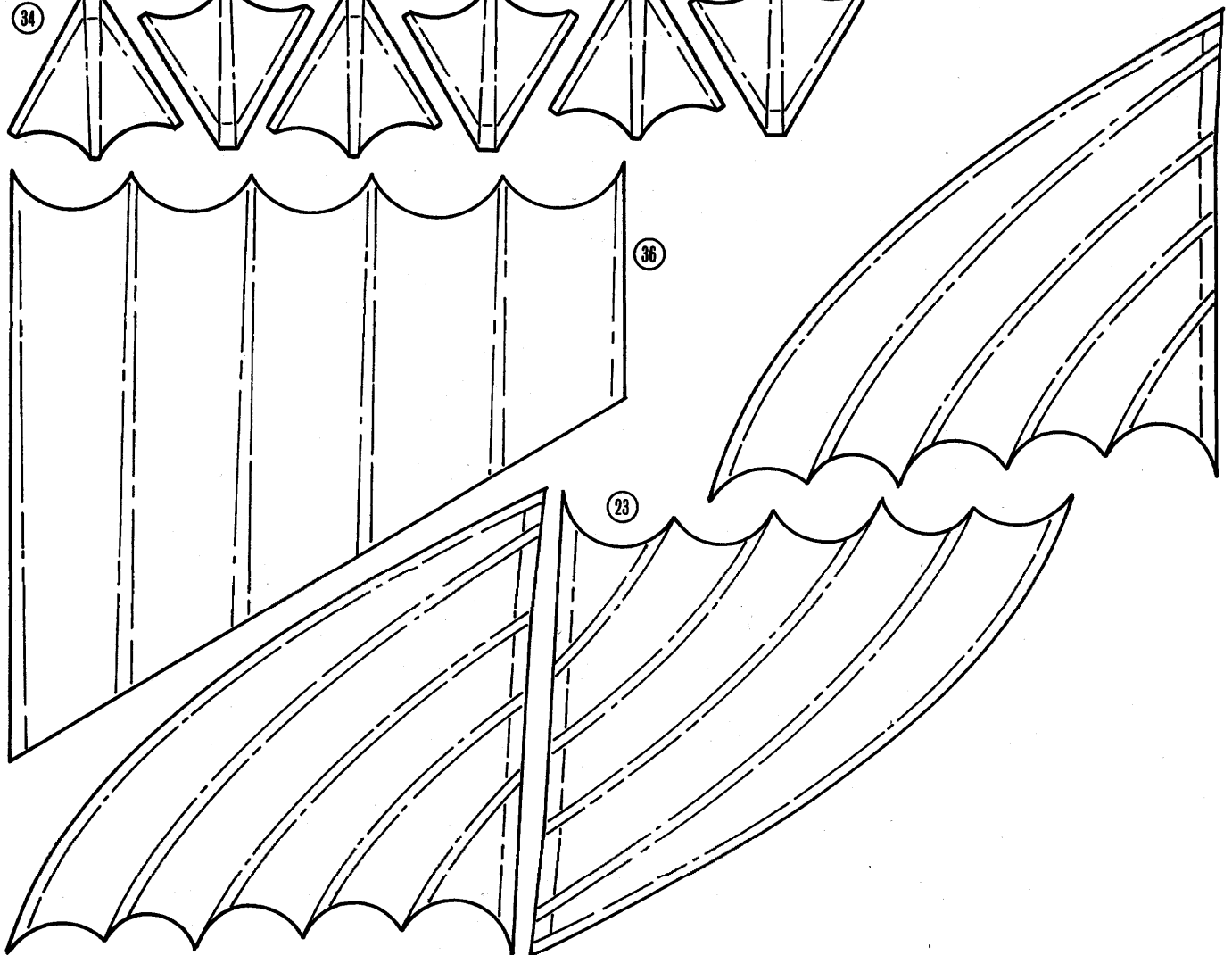
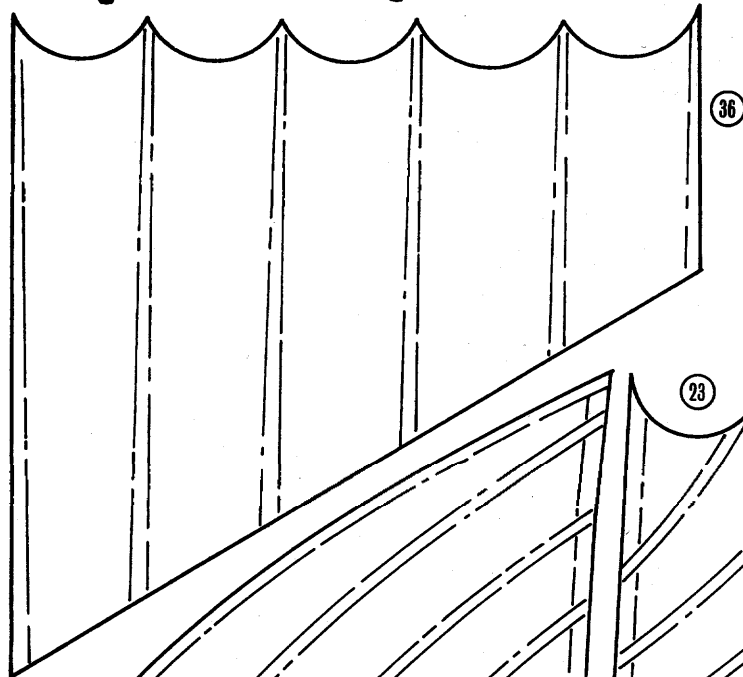
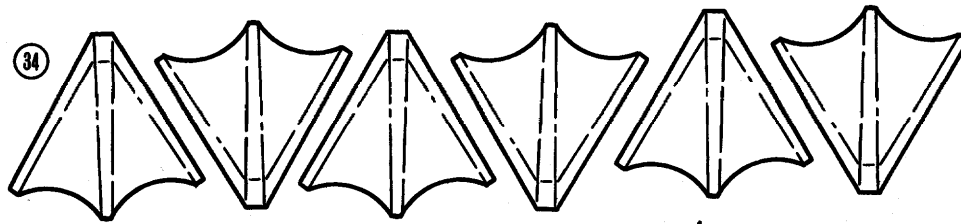
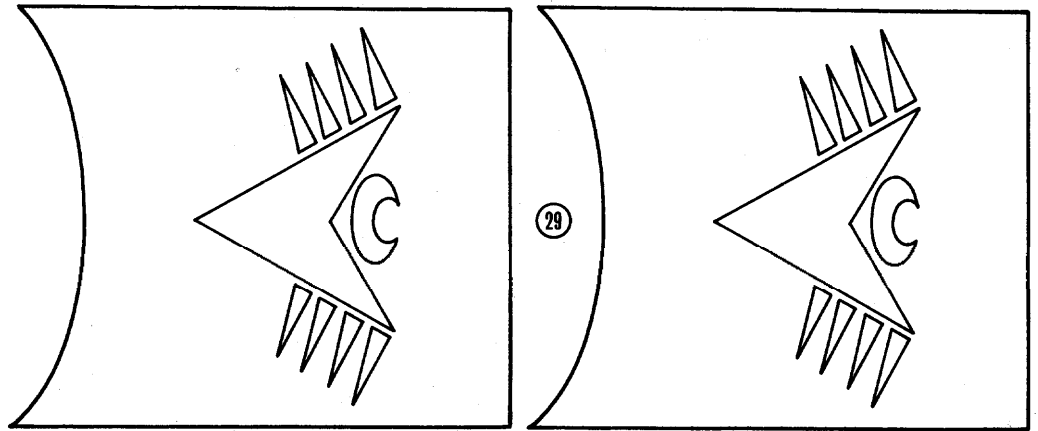
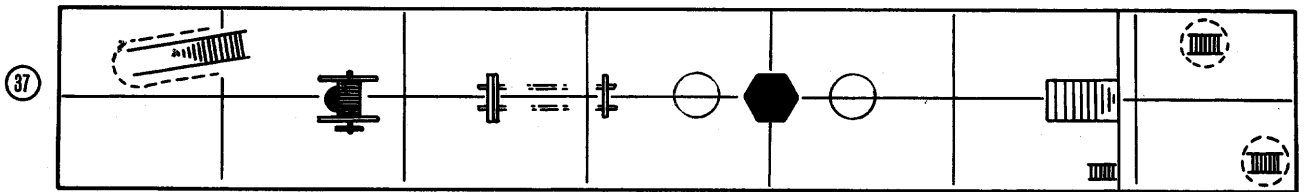
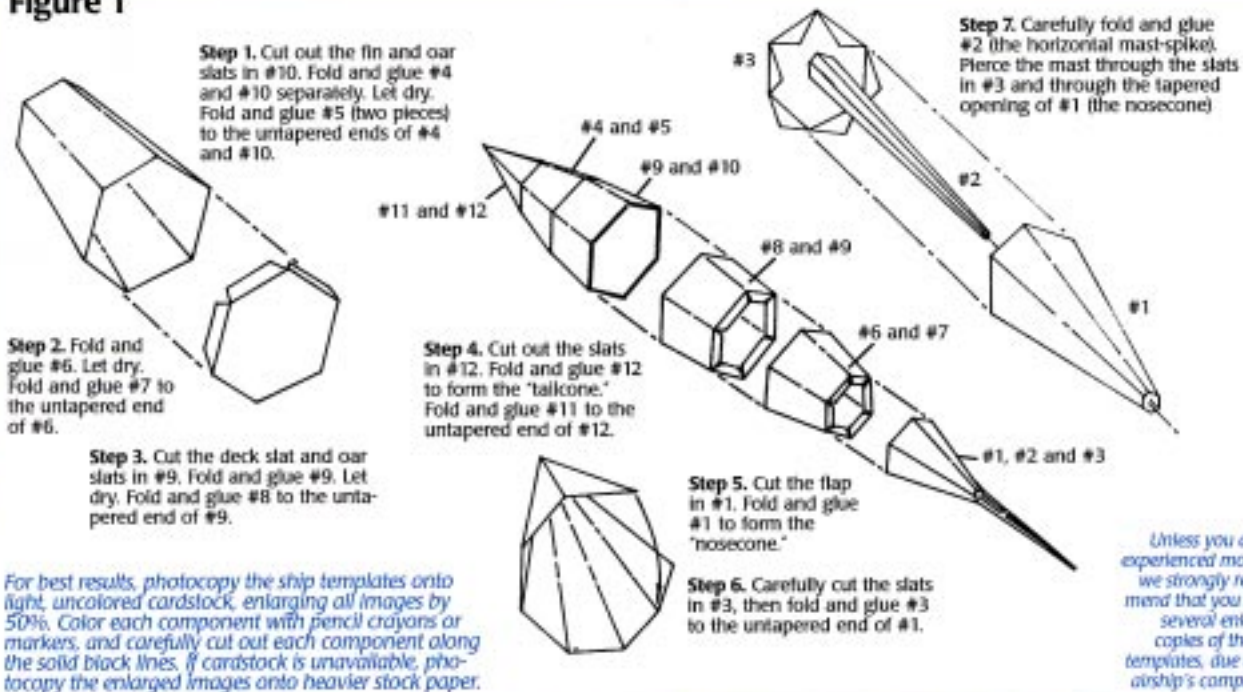


Figure 1



Jutting from the mountain's icy peak are dozens of landing platforms designed expressly for Xakhun windships. Each is adorned with elaborate spider emblems and mystical drow symbology. The adornment of landing plateaus is never left to the hired help. This is solely the province of highly skilled Xakhun artisans, once the menial labor has been finished.

Guarding the spire from gnomish zeppelins and similar incursions is a flight of six young white dragons that reside on the mountain's topmost crags. These ravenous drakes are held in check by Serendrek the Mountain Lord, a frost giant employed by the Xakhun.

The Xakhun's strategy for conquest and expansion is to secure a web of landing plateaus throughout the range of their travels. When Xakhun emissaries penetrate new areas, they are eager to contact local brutes. The initial phases of base construction are often carried out by slave gangs under the whip of task-masters in Xakhun employ. The slaves are usually human, demihuman, or humanoid. The task-masters are generally ogres, duergar, trolls or similar thugs eager for Xakhun gold. The slaves are always destroyed when construction is completed to prevent rumor of their endeavors from escaping.

The Xakhun keep the locations of their landing sites secret. The penalty

for revealing the location of a landing site to "outsiders" is death.

Movement & Combat

Of Ships and the Sea (OSAS) outlines the rules governing nautical movement and combat. These same rules are applied to aerial combat aboard the windships of the Xakhun, with modifications as noted below.

Sailing Movement and Winds

The speed of a Xakhun windship is improved or hampered by the prevailing wind, as determined using **Table 3: Sailing Movement and Winds** in *OSAS*. Thus, a windship moving with a moderate wind would have two-thirds of its base movement rate added to its overall movement, for a new combined rate of 30 ($18+3=6$, $6 \times 2=12$, $12+18=30$).

To determine the strength of the prevailing wind, use **Table 4: Wind Strength** in *OSAS*. To determine wind direction, refer to **Table 5: Wind Direction**.

Skyworthiness

All nautical vessels in the AD&D® game possess a Seaworthiness rating between 1 and 20. The higher the rating, the more stable the vessel. The Xakhun windship uses Skyworthiness to measure its ability to remain airborne in adverse conditions. Like the Seaworthiness rating, Skyworthiness

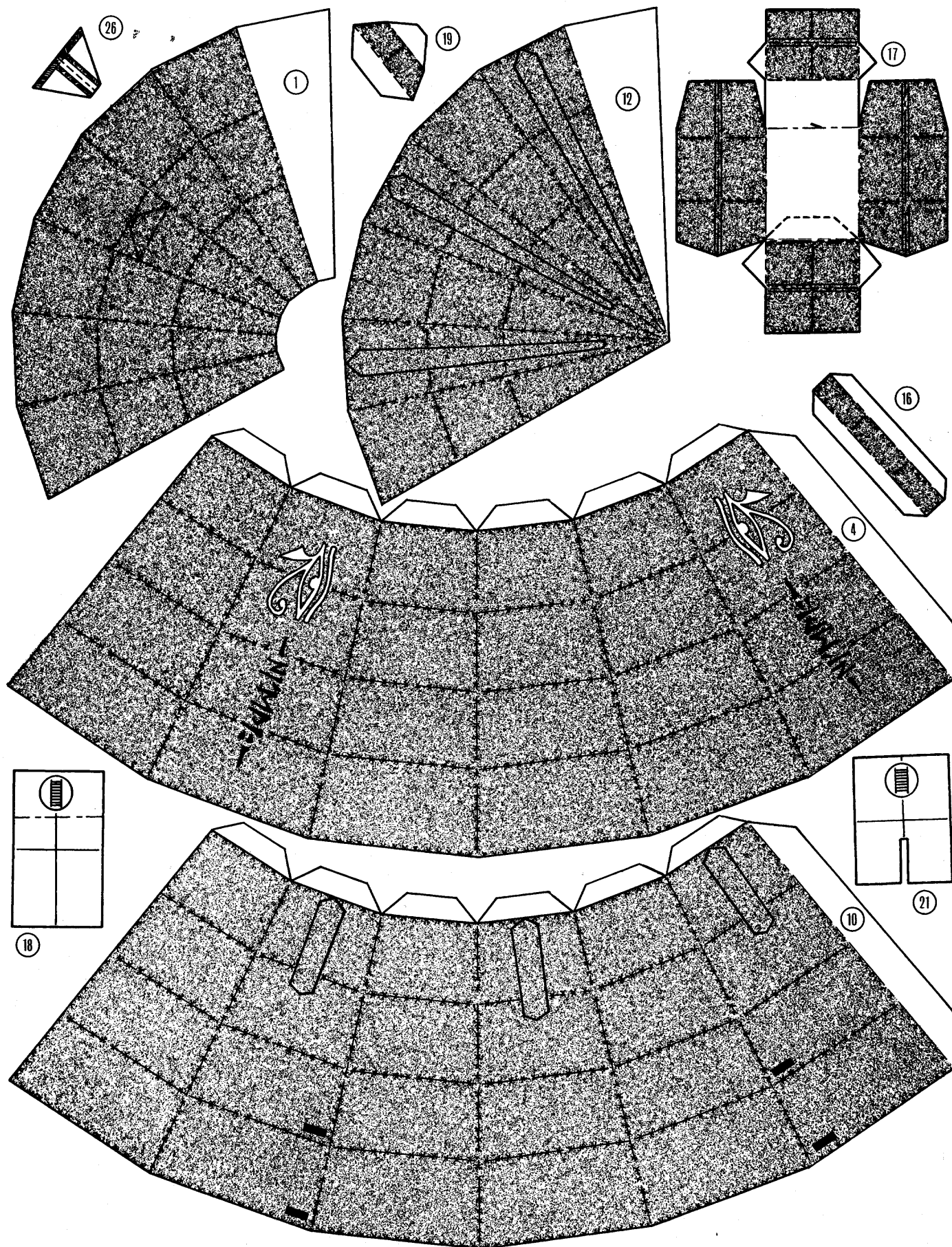
is rated between 1 and 20. An undamaged Xakhun windship has a base Skyworthiness rating of 9.

To make a Skyworthiness check, the DM rolls 1d20. If the result is greater than the windship's current Skyworthiness rating, the vessel "founders" and is forced down. If the roll is four or more higher than the ship's current Skyworthiness rating, the descent cannot be controlled, and the ship crashes. If a natural 20 is rolled, the ship breaks apart in the air, sending hull fragments and crew cascading to the ground.

Rules governing the survival of a shipwreck are given on page 25 of *OSAS*. The DM determines whether the downed windship sinks gradually or crashes, whether it lands on earth or water, and how much damage (if any) is suffered by those stranded aboard.

For every 4 hull points of damage inflicted upon a Xakhun windship, the vessel loses one point from its Skyworthiness rating. When the windship drops to 0 hull points or below, it falls from the sky. The ship hits ground in 1d8 rounds, rolled by the DM. (Obviously, a roll of 1 indicates a rapid fall, likely resulting in the deaths of all aboard.) Note that this is different from nautical ships of equal size, which sink in 1d12 rounds.

When a Xakhun windship loses half of its hull points, it must make a successful Skyworthiness check or



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“drift” in a random direction for 1d10 hours before the spider-rigger and crew can compensate for the damage and regain control of the vessel. Every time a windship loses an additional quarter of its remaining hull points, it must make another Skyworthiness check to avoid further “drifting.” On a Skyworthiness roll of natural 20, the windship is forced down, landing in 1d8 rounds.

In all other respects, damage to a Xakhun windship is determined the same as with their nautical counterparts, as explained in the Resolution Phase of “Chapter 4: Nautical Combat” in *OSAS* (pages 51-53).

Ship Combat Rounds

Similar to nautical combat, combat rounds aboard a Xakhun windship can be measured in one-minute, 10-minute, or 30-minute intervals depending on how far apart the combatants are when the round begins. See **Table 1** for details (page 49).

With windships, this distance is not necessarily measured on a lateral or horizontal plane given their ability to change altitude.

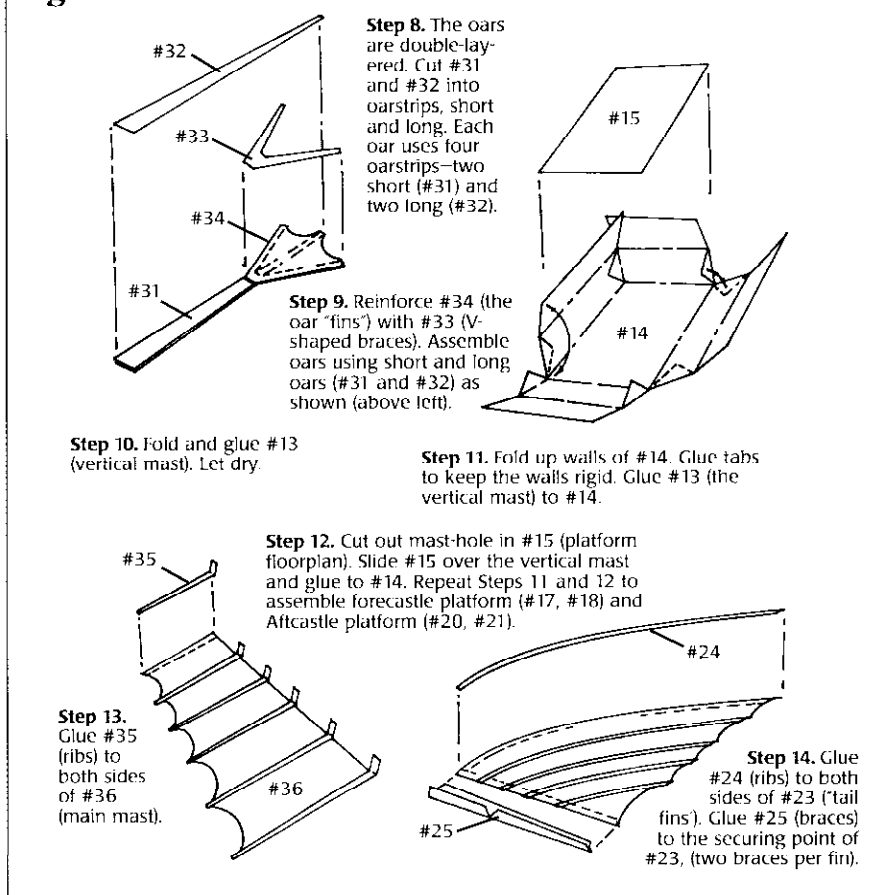
Possible combat maneuvers are listed on **Table 13: Maneuverability and Combat** (*OSAS*). Certain maneuvers become meaningless as the distance between vessels increases.

Special Close Range Maneuvers

The Xakhun have perfected five unorthodox close-range (0-250 yards) combat maneuvers that allow them to get the “jump” on their enemies: deploy spiders, hurl egg sacks, rock the boat, web-lock, and the Vengeance of Lolth.

Deploy Spiders: Each Xakhun windship allied with Lolth carries a small complement of attack spiders (in addition to the spider-rigger). A ship may have leaping sword spiders or drop spiders, but never both; the leaping spiders are ideal against airborne foes; the drop spiders (paratroopers) are better suited against nautical vessels and groundlings. These creatures are commanded by the crew’s spider-maiden. (Because the spider-maiden is the only member of the crew who can command and control the spiders, this individual is often closely guarded by her crewmates and spiders.) A typical Xakhun vessel carries 1d4+1 leaping sword spiders or 1d6+4 drop spiders. These count as “artillery” in combat.

Figure 2



A windship’s spider-rigger is never deployed in combat; its sole purview is the maintenance of the rigging and ship membrane. However, it can be lured away from its primary duties to defend the ship’s spider-maiden.

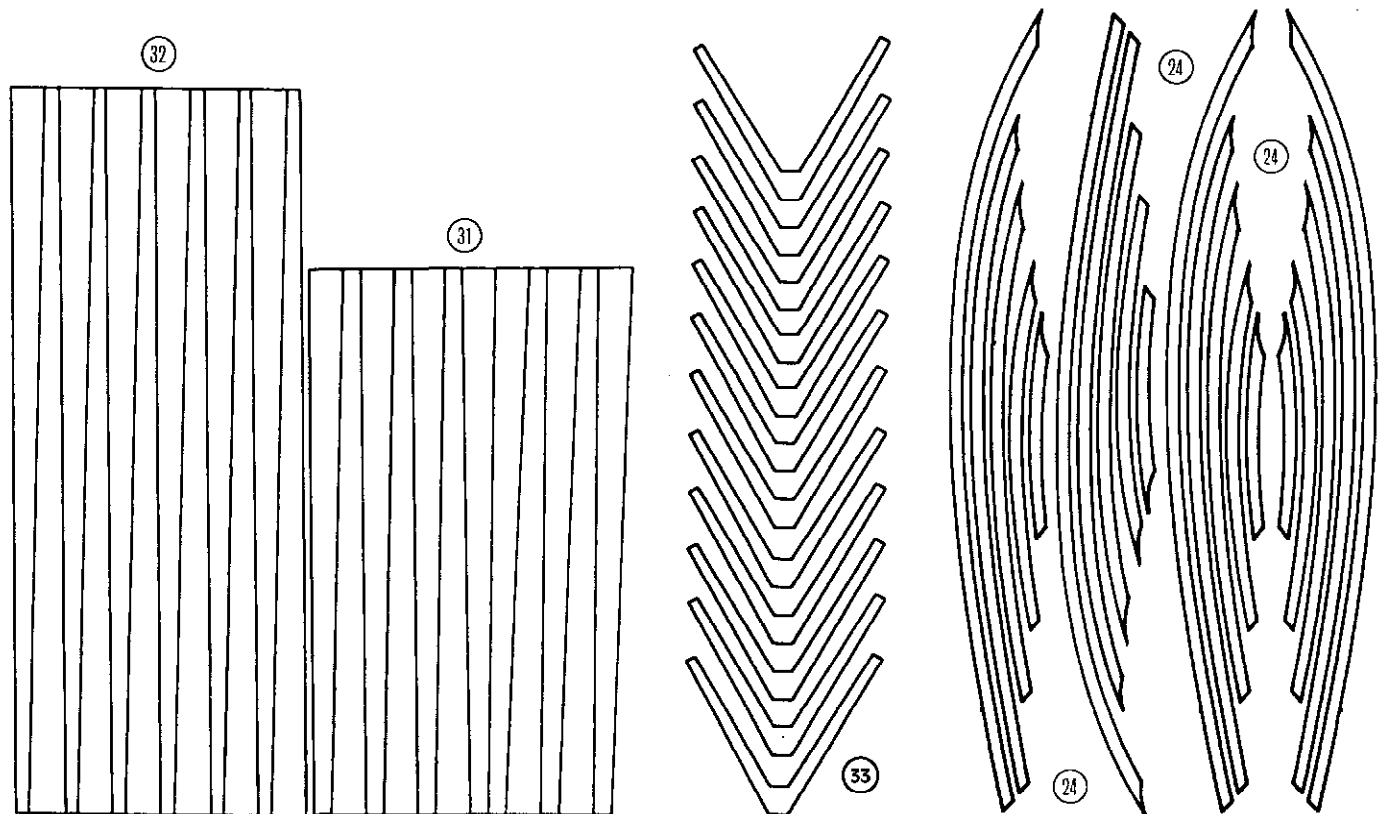
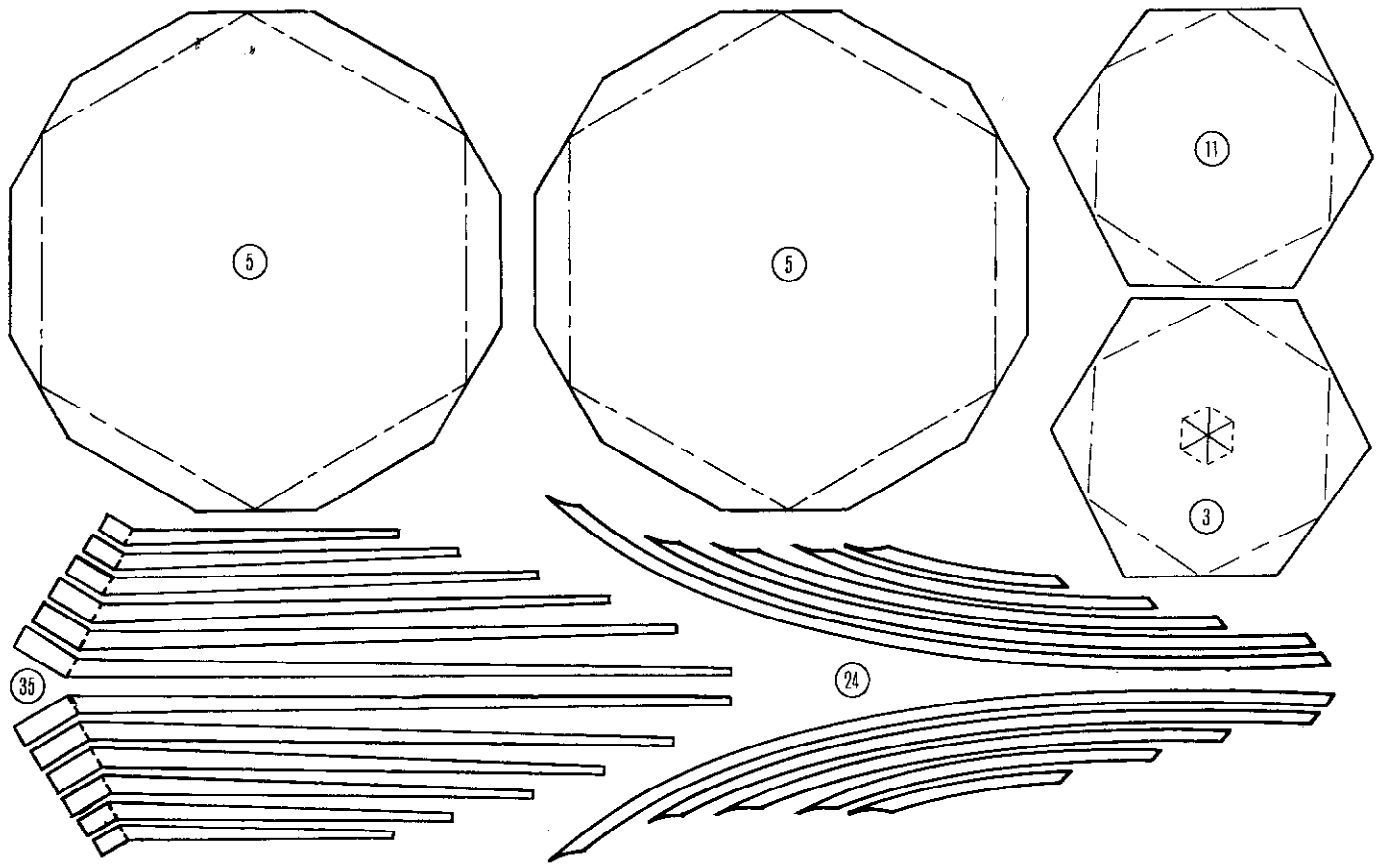
Hurl Egg Sacks: If the Xakhun have any available cargo space, they will often carry large 20-lb. sacks of spider eggs. These sacks are woven from spider webbing and contain hundreds of writhing hairy spiders (see *MONSTROUS MANUALS™*, page 326) that eventually grow into full-sized drop spiders or leaping sword spiders. The sacks spill open onto enemy decks, sending the minuscule spiders scurrying. Although the baby spiders are only a minor poisonous threat, they will often find places to hide until they mature in 1d4+1 weeks, at which time they emerge to feed. (Particularly mean-spirited Xakhun have been known to fly over pastures and drop several of these sacks into the fields, infesting the entire area with deadly arachnids that not only wipe out the livestock, but the farmers as well.)

Rock the Boat: With a single command, the Xakhun captain can order

her crew to rock the windship the following round. This maneuver can only be attempted with a full crew complement and is usually done in response to enemy boarding. At the beginning of the next round, the ship suddenly keels to one side or the other, spilling the unwary boarders off the ship while the Xakhun crew holds fast.

Enemies who brace themselves for this tactic receive a Dexterity check to avoid slipping and falling. Those caught unaware make their roll at half their Dexterity scores, rounded down. If the roll is failed by 4 or more, the individual slips off the windship and falls. Otherwise, the individual is knocked to the deck, is unable to act for the remainder of the round, and suffers a -4 penalty to initiative the following round. Braced Xakhun are not required to make Dexterity checks.

Web-lock: In lieu of traditional grapples, the Xakhun are known to employ web spells and spidersilk lines to form linkages with enemy vessels. The Xakhun and their spider minions are able to cross or “slide” down the web strands onto ships within boarding range. Other species attempting



similar maneuvers are 50% likely to become entangled in the strands (treat as second level Wizard's web spell). Boarding actions are fully detailed in Chapter 4 of OSAS.

Fire and edged weapons are effective means of severing the Xakhun boarding lines, each of which requires 6 hp damage to burn or sever. Blunt and piercing weapons are useless in breaking the resilient strands.

Xakhun windships do not tether themselves to nautical ships or other surface fixtures unless absolutely necessary. They prefer to use drop lines spun by the spiders to lower boarders onto seaborne vessels or the ground.

Vengeance of Lolth: Rather than allow a windship to fall into enemy hands, Xakhun skymistresses have been known to destroy the ship in a spectacular fashion, killing boarders as well as the crew. (The skymistress, meanwhile, teleports to safety.)

Opening all of the windship's gas valves evacuates the uhl from the ship's hold, but not fast enough for the ship to plummet dramatically. That is why many Xakhun captains have a doomspider companion. These head-sized spiders are equipped with two internal sacks bloated with non-volatile compounds that explode when combined. This "gift" from the demoness Lolth is left behind after the ship's skymistress escapes, at which time the doomspider mixes the chemicals internally and explodes with the force of a *delayed blast fireball* spell.

The safest course of action for anyone hoping to procure a Xakhun windship is to make sure the captain's furry doomspider is thrown off the ship or lost prior to the vessel's capture. At least one captain has been known to care enough about her "pet" to take it with her, leaving the vessel in enemy hands rather than destroy her favored companion.

Boarding Actions

See **Table 27: Boarding Action Results** in OSAS to determine the success or failure of any boarding attempt by the Xakhun or their enemies.

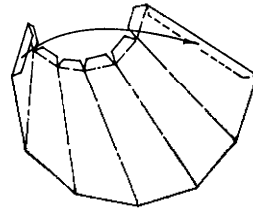
Crew Morale & Modifiers

Xakhun crewmembers are treated as "mariners" with respect to morale (ML 15). DMs may apply situational modifiers to their morale checks as described in "Chapter 4: Nautical Combat" of OSAS (pages 53-55).

Figure 3

Step 15. Glue #10 to #12 to form the tailcone of the ship. Let dry. Glue tail fins to the tailcone using the fin braces (#25).

Step 16. Glue assembled dorsal sail (#35, #36) to #13 (vertical mast). Let dry.

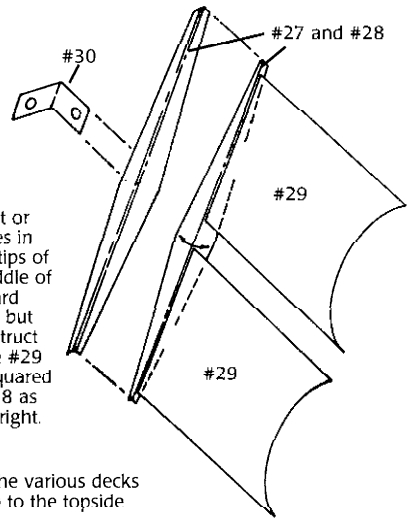


Folding the Hull

Step 18. Fold #27 and #28 along their lateral creases. Glue the tips of #27 and #28 together.

Step 19. Glue #1, #2, #3, #6, #7, #8, and #9 to form the ship's "nose." Slip #30 over the horizontal mast (#2) using the holes.

Step 17. Cut or punch holes in #30. Glue tips of #30 to middle of #28 (forward mast spar), but do not obstruct holes. Glue #29 (forward squared sails) to #28 as shown on right.



Step 20. Affix the various decks (#14, #17, #20) to the topside of the ship.

- Use #16 to level the "aft" end of the Upper Deck by gluing it to the underside of #14.
- Use #19 to level the aftcastle by gluing it to the underside of #21.
- Fold #26 into a "V" and insert it through the slot in #1, using it to support #18 (the forecastle platform).

Step 21. Assemble and glue the nose and tail sections of the ship. Glue the assembled platforms to the top of the hull.

Step 22. Fold #22 and glue the landing skids to the underside of the ship's hull.

Combat Aboard a Windship

Xakhun windshippers are trained in the subtleties of windship combat. While aboard the windship, they never throw projectiles of any sort, nor do they chance losing their daggers by making missile attacks of them. Xakhun crew members always opt for the most stealthy assaults. They favor hiding, surprising, and backstabbing with poisoned daggers.

Accidental Punctures: Sharp pokes, stray blows or ill-cast spells might rip the thin patchwork of hides that form the windship's membrane. Melee and missile attack rolls of 1 (on a d20) not only miss their intended targets but also result in a membrane puncture. When a membrane is punctured, all characters within 10 feet must make a Constitution check with a -1 penalty

for each additional puncture in the vicinity. Failure indicates dizziness resulting in a -1 penalty to hit. A new check is required each turn. A character who fails two consecutive checks falls unconscious and remains so until the punctures are sealed or the victim is removed from the area, at which point he or she awakens in 1d4+1 turns.

Overloading the Ladder Chutes:

The windship's ladders are designed to bear only about 150 lbs. Every 10 lbs. of additional weight placed on a ladder has a 1% chance of causing the ladder and its chute to tear away from its mountings. (Thus, a 220-lb. human fighter has a 7% chance of destroying the ladder, while two 150-lb. individuals climbing the ladder at once have a 15% chance of breaking it.)

When a ladder rips away, the windship immediately sustains 1d2 hull

Table 1: Ship Combat Rounds

| Distance | Time | Possible Actions |
|---------------|---------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 0-250 yards | 1 min. | Flee, Evade, Close, Ram ¹ , Board ² , Spell ² , Missile ² , Artillery ² |
| 251-1,000 yds | 10 min. | Flee, Close, Spell ² , Artillery ² |
| 1,001 + yards | 30 min. | Flee, Close, Spell ² |

1. A windship is too delicate to ram another ship without damaging itself considerably, so ramming tactics are avoided except in moments of utter desperation. A ship cannot ram or board its opponent unless it first reduces the distance to the target ship to zero.

2. Providing the distance between opposing ships when the round begins is not greater than the range of the attacker's artillery, spell, or archery. Xakhun windship "artillery" consists of leaping sword spiders and drop spiders.

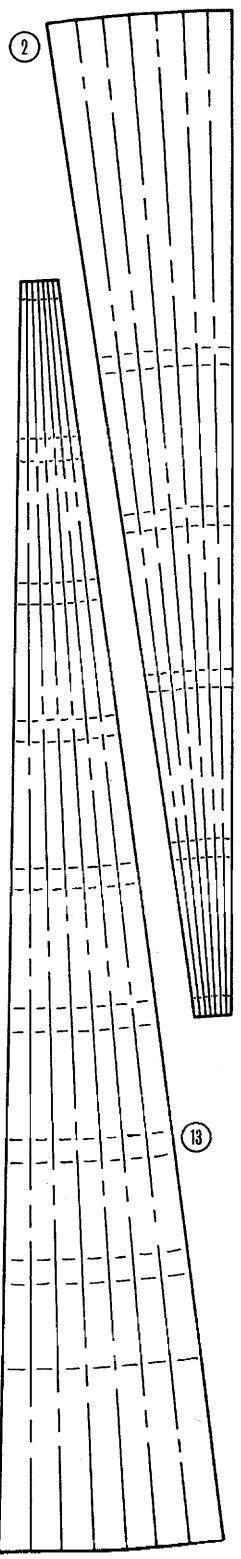
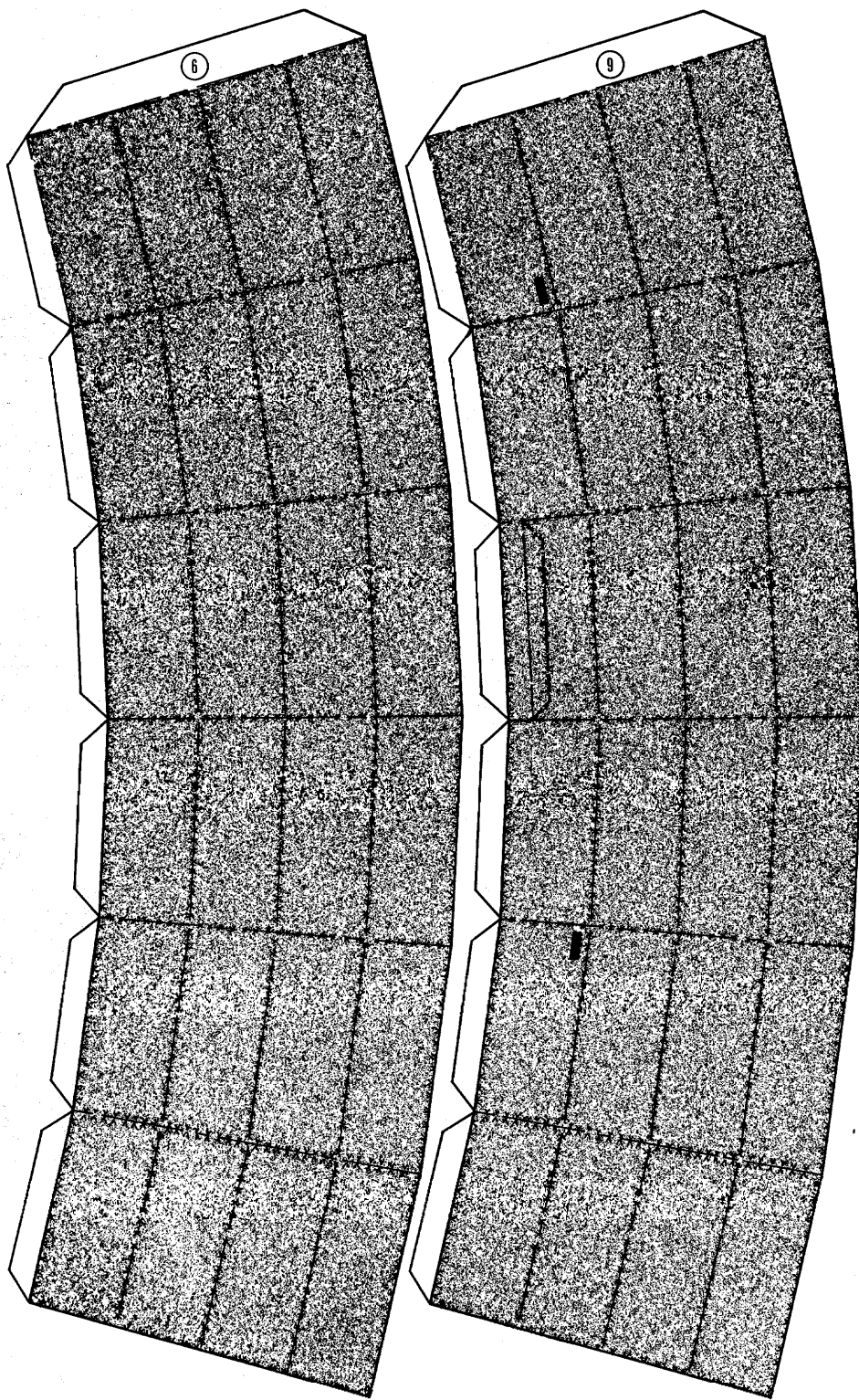


Table 2: Crashing Through the Deck

| Height of Drop (feet) | 0-10 | 11-30 | 30+ |
|-----------------------|------|-------|-----|
| 150 lbs. or less | d12 | d8 | d6 |
| 151-200 lbs. | d8 | d6 | d4 |
| 201-300 lbs. | d6 | d4 | * |
| 300+ lbs. | d4 | * | * |

* Creature automatically falls through the deck, no roll required.

points damage. The ladder tumbles into the gas hold, along with the climbers, who then suffer the effects of the noxious gas rupture. There's also a chance that characters falling from the ladder might crash through the crew compartments ceiling deck, or even the outer membrane. The DM may adjudicate the results of such a mishap, perhaps allowing each character to make a Dexterity check to avoid taking damage or—worse—falling off the ship.

Crashing Though the Deck:

Characters who spring from deck to deck or drop onto the windship from above have a chance of going through the deck. Falling or leaping down upon the deck can cause the planking to give way and burst membranes below. This occurs on a roll of 1 on a d4, d6, d8 or d12 (as indicated in **Table 2**, above). Falling damage is normally 1d6 hp per deck fallen. The DM should decide the effects of such damage to the ship, its hull, and its Skyworthiness.

Called Shots Against Xakhun Windships

When confronted by a hostile Xakhun windship, opponents have several options to damage or cripple the vessel using called shots. (Otherwise, assume all damage is subtracted from the windship's total hull/crippling points.) For instance, characters with *fly* spells or pegasus mounts could focus their attacks on the windship's membranous gas hold, thus forcing the ship down. Similarly, characters on the ground might try picking off members of the windship crew.

Puncturing the Membrane: The taut membrane containing the Xan Kraban's uhl vapor is resilient and specially treated to resist punctures, ruptures, and other potentially catastrophic breaches. Unless an attack destroys a considerable portion of the membrane (as would a *disintegrate* spell), the effect

is not too serious. (The windship does not "pop" like a balloon.) A called shot to the membrane normally results in a puncture if the attack inflicts at least 1 hull point of damage.

For every 10 hp weapon damage inflicted to a single area, the ship loses 1 hull point. Most normal arrows inflict 1d6 or 1d8 hp damage—not enough to seriously penetrate the resilient membrane. However, a fighter who plunges his magical long sword through the membrane has a chance of creating a serious puncture.

A puncture in the windship's membrane is handled by the ship's spider-rigger and/or crew. A spider-rigger can mobilize and repair a 1 hull point puncture using webs and pasty salivic fluids in 1d3 rounds; a single crewman can do the job in 2d4+1 rounds. This hasty mending restores any hull point(s) that were lost as a result of the puncture. Failure to seal a puncture within 1 turn has a 25% chance of creating a rupture in the membrane, resulting in a loss of 1d3 hull points and forcing a Skyworthiness check.

Rupturing a Windship's Membrane:

Ruptures are more serious than punctures and occur when part of the windship's membrane suffers more than one hull point of damage. *Lightning bolts*, ship collisions, and large sharp edges result in a rupture if the membrane sustains 2 hull points or 20 hp damage to a localized section.

Crew Hits: Anyone attacking the windship from a distance using missile fire can elect to target specific crew members. The usual penalty for called shots applies (-4 to hit), compounded by adverse conditions and cover. All creatures on the exposed decks of a Xan Kraban are obscured enough by the rigging to warrant a -1 AC bonus against attacks from off-ship.

Attacking a Windship's Rudder, Oars, Rigging, or Sails: Damage from such attacks are subtracted from the windship's total crippling points (36). A called shot to one specific target (say, an oar) suffers the usual -4 "called shot" attack penalty. However, these vital systems can withstand only so much damage. The rudder can sustain no more than 4 hull points (40 hp) damage; each oar can withstand 2 hull points (20 hp); each sail can withstand 3 hull points (30 hp). Damage to the rigging (even from directed attacks) is always deducted from the ship's remaining crippling points.

Summary of Windship Model Components

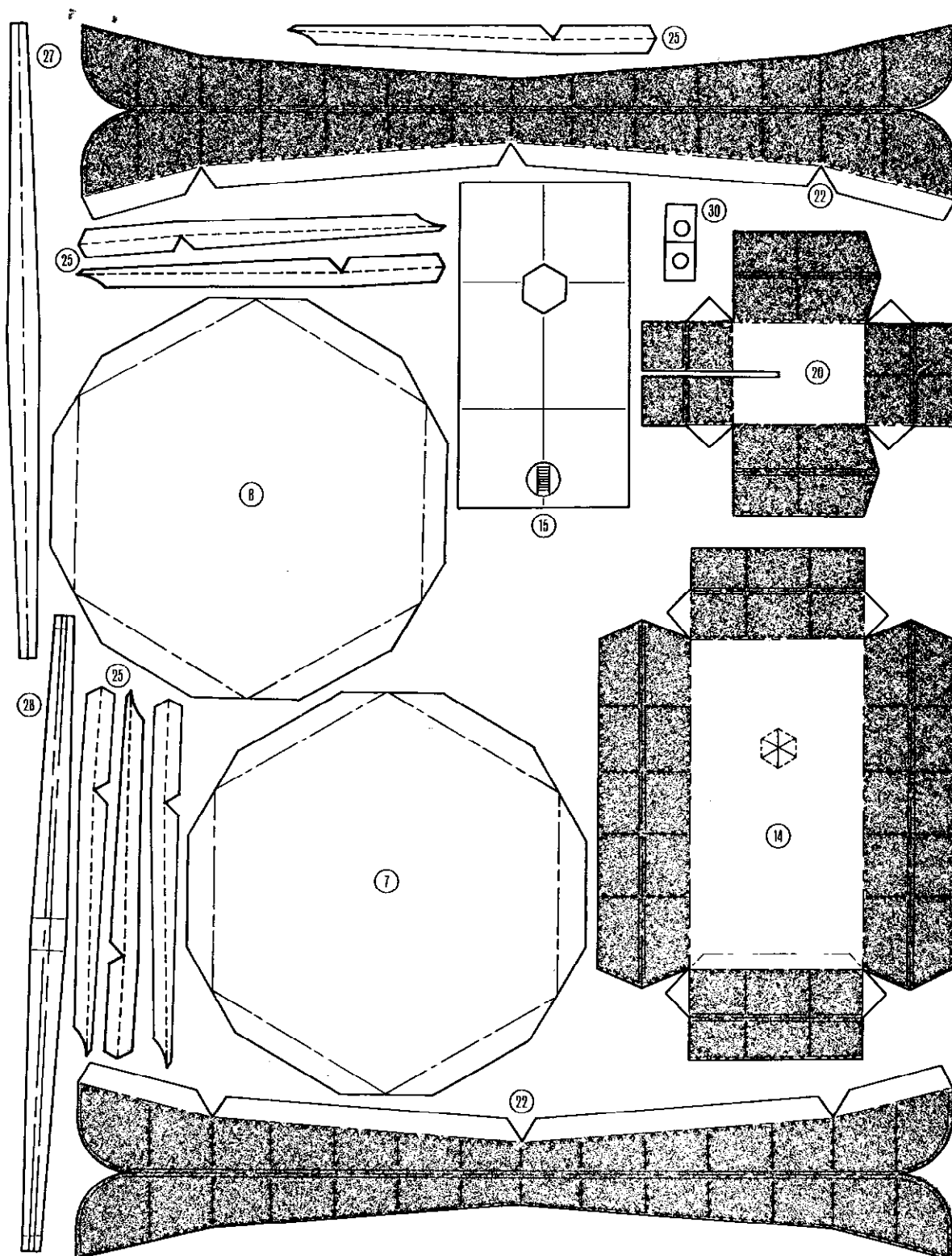
1. Windship "nose" (fore)
2. Horizontal mast
3. Windship "nose" fixture
4. Primary (fore) hull
5. Hull fixtures (2)
6. Primary (central-fore) hull
7. Hull fixture
8. Hull fixture
9. Primary (central-aft) hull
10. Primary (aft) hull
11. Windship "tail" fixture
12. Windship "tail" (aft)
13. Vertical mast
14. Upper deck platform
15. Upper deck plan
16. Upper deck platform support
17. Forecastle
18. Forecastle deck plan
19. Forecastle deck support
20. Aftcastle platform
21. Aftcastle deck plan
22. landing skids (2)
23. Tail fins (3)
24. Tail fin spines (30)
25. Tail fin fixtures (6)
26. Aftcastle deck support
27. Horizontal mast spar
28. Horizontal mast spar
29. Forward sails (2)
30. Horizontal mast "loop"
31. Short oar braces (12)
32. Oars (12)
33. Oar paddle ridges (12)
34. Oar paddles (6)
35. Dorsal sail spines (10)
36. Dorsal sail
37. Lower (interior) deck plan*

* This deck plan is not part of the model but is included for reference.

Igniting the Uhl Vapor: In its solid and gaseous states, uhl is nonflammable. It does not ignite like oxygen. So, while *fireball* spells will certainly damage the delicate windship (if not with blast damage than with rampant fires), the uhl will not contribute in any measurable way to the ship's ultimate demise. Uhl vapor has the virtue of being lighter than oxygen, which accounts for its tremendous lift.



Former DRAGON® Magazine art director Roger Raupp now works as a freelance illustrator from his home in Wisconsin.



Spider, Xakhun

| | Doomspider (Large) | Drop Spider (Huge) | Spider Rigger (Giant) | Leaping Sword Spider (Sword, variant) |
|-------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| CLIMATE/TERRAIN: | Any non-arctic | Any non-arctic | Any non-arctic | Any non-arctic |
| FREQUENCY: | Very rare | Rare | Very rare | Rare |
| ORGANIZATION: | Solitary | Platoon (pack) | Solitary | Platoon (pack) |
| ACTIVITY CYCLE: | Any | Any | Any | Any |
| DIET: | Omnivore | Carnivore | Omnivore | Carnivore |
| INTELLIGENCE: | Semi- (2-4) | Low (5-7) | Average (8-10) | Low (5-7) |
| TREASURE: | Nil | Nil | Nil | Nil |
| ALIGNMENT: | Neutral | Chaotic evil | Neutral evil | Chaotic evil |
| NO. APPEARING: | 1 | 2-10 | 1 | 2-5 |
| ARMOR CLASS: | 8 | 6 | 4 | 3 |
| MOVEMENT: | 9, Wb 9 | 18, Wb 12 | 12, Wb 12 | 6, Wb 9 |
| HIT DICE: | 1+1 | 2+2 | 4+4 | 3+3 |
| THACO: | 19 | 19 | 15 | 17 |
| NO. OF ATTACKS: | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 + special |
| DAMAGE/ATTACK: | 1 | 1-6 | 1-8 | 2-8 (bite) plus 1-10 per leg |
| SPECIAL ATTACKS: | Fireball | Poison, webs | Poison, webs | Leap, webs |
| SPECIAL DEFENSES: | Nil | Nil | +4 to saves vs. gas | See below |
| MAGIC RESISTANCE: | Nil | Nil | Nil | Nil |
| SIZE: | S (2' diameter) | M (5' diameter) | L (7' diameter) | M (5' diameter) |
| MORALE: | Average (8) | Elite (14) | Steady (12) | Elite (14) |
| XP VALUE: | 270 | 420 | 975 | 1,400 |

As an extension of their worship of Lolth, the Xakhun revere spiders, for they are all the demoness' children. Four types of spiders are most commonly encountered aboard Xakhun windships. The usual complement for a Xan Kraban is as follows: one doomspider (the captain's "pet"), one spider rigger (for maintaining and repairing a ship's rigging), and either 1d6+4 drop spiders or 1d4+1 leaping sword spiders. For reasons that defy explanation, the drop spiders and sword spiders do not get along and cannot coexist aboard the same vessel without poisoning and dismembering each other. If there are any spiders aboard a windship, there must also be a trained Xakhun spidermaiden to command and control the sometimes ornery arachnids.

Doomspider (large variety)

The doomspider (known to foes of the Xakhun as the "Vengeance of Lolth") is the most innocuous-and perhaps the most dangerous-arachnid aboard any Xakhun vessel. This furry black spider's bite inflicts 1 hp damage and is not poisonous. However, the creature has a pair of internal sacks each holding about a gallon of non-volatile resin. The spider can, at will, relax an internal sphincter that allows the chemicals to combine, triggering a decidedly volatile reaction that not only consumes the spider but triggers the equivalent of a *delayed blast fireball*, inflicting 8d6+8 hp damage to all within 20 feet. The doomspider is intelligent enough to fathom basic commands, but it obeys only its chosen mistress (usually the windship captain). Although doomspiders await their mistresses' command before mixing their internal chemicals, at least one Xakhun captain has been incinerated by her own pet-perhaps the result of offending Lolth in some fashion. Once the chemicals are mixed, the explosive process cannot be halted; the explosion occurs the following round-just enough time for the captain to make good her escape via magic.

Killing a doomspider has the same effect, triggering an explosion one round after the creature's death.

When not commanded to "self-destruct," the doomspider is a relatively docile arachnid. It bites only those who attack it or its mistress. If its mistress is slain, a doomspider usually explodes 1d4 rounds afterward. The trick is to throw it off the ship before the inevitable occurs.

Drop Spider (huge variety)

Drop spiders are web-spinning huge spiders specially trained to launch themselves off the deck and lower themselves via web strands onto ships, groundlings, or anything else passing beneath the windship. Even if a drop spider's web strand is severed unexpectedly, the spider can often (80%) react quickly enough to shoot another strand, reafixing itself to the Xakhun vessel before the end of the same round, so long as it remains within 30 feet of the windship. Moreover, the spider can withstand falls of any distance due to a unique cartilage structure in its legs. Thus, a drop spider could fall hundreds of feet and land on the ground without injury. However, for every 100 feet fallen, the drop spider must spend one round "stabilizing" itself. During this period of recovery, the spider cannot attack and suffers a -4 penalty to Armor Class.

Drop spiders have a thin mesh between their legs that enables them to glide toward designated targets with greater accuracy. They do not plummet uncontrollably, instead spiraling downward, seeking the best place to land and attack.

Drop spiders bite their prey, injecting Type D poison. In creating these beasts, the Xakhun also tampered with the venom. Not only does the affected victim suffer damage, but the poison causes severe disorientation. Anyone failing a save vs. poison succumbs to this "residual effect" immediately, suffering a -2 penalty to attack rolls and saving throws. This effect is not cumulative with multiple bites.

Drop spiders can shoot their webs either to secure a line to climb (or descend) or to entangle a foe. In the latter case, treat the drop spider's web as that of a large spider, except that the drop spider's web is a single strand with a range of 30 feet.

Spider Rigger (giant variety)

Spider riggers are essentially giant spiders that have been trained to maintain and repair the rigging of the Xan Kraban windships. They are as relentless in this task as normal giant spiders are at devouring prey. The spider rigger is more intelligent and responsive than its brutal kin, however, and it takes enough pride in its handiwork to attack bitterly any foe who deliberately severs the rigging or otherwise hampers the maneuverability of the vessel. Since the spider rigger plays such an important role aboard ship, it is the most important member of the Xakhun crew (next to the captain, of course) and is closely guarded.

Spider riggers have the same poisonous bite and web-spinning ability common to all giant spiders. They are immune to the dizzying effects of uhl vapor and receive +4 to their saves vs. other gas-based attacks and spells.

Leaping Sword Spider (sword variety)

These are smaller versions of the sword spider (see the *MONSTROUS MANUAL™* tome, page 326). The Xakhun breed them smaller to fit aboard the confined Xakhun windships. Each spider can leap as far as 60 feet horizontally, impaling its prey with up to eight legs. Only one attack roll is made for the creature. If the attack is successful, the victim is struck by a number of legs based on its size: size S, three legs; size M, four legs; size L, five legs; size H, six legs; size G, all eight legs. Each leg inflicts 1-10 hp damage.

All upward attacks against the leaping sword spider receive a -4 penalty to the attack roll due to the impaling blades that protect the spider. The leaping spider's bite is not poisonous, but it can bite its victim in the same round it jabs with its sword-like legs.

Of all the Xakhun spiders, leaping sword spiders are the most difficult to train. If not treated well by their handlers, they are known to vent their irritation upon the crew and, sometimes, upon the ship itself. Unless the spidermaiden can regain control with a successful spider handling proficiency check, the untenable spiders must be destroyed.

Although sword spiders are ill-tempered and pose an obvious threat to the delicate Xakhun windships, they are inordinately stealthy, always moving carefully about deck without slashing the ship's rigging. In the rare event a leaping spider goes berserk, the spider rigger is usually quick to put it down before any serious damage is done.

Habitat/Society: The Xakhun spiders exist to bolster the fighting capability of the Xan Krabans. They normally "reside" in the crew compartment of the windship until called upon to attack nearby ships and enemies.

As mentioned previously, drop spiders and leaping sword spiders do not get along and cannot inhabit the same vessel. All spider types are raised with an inbred respect for the spider rigger and never conceive of attacking one, even if the spider rigger attacks it. The doomsider is basically ignored by the other spider varieties.

Since spiders are sacred to Lolth and the Xakhun, they are well guarded and shepherded.

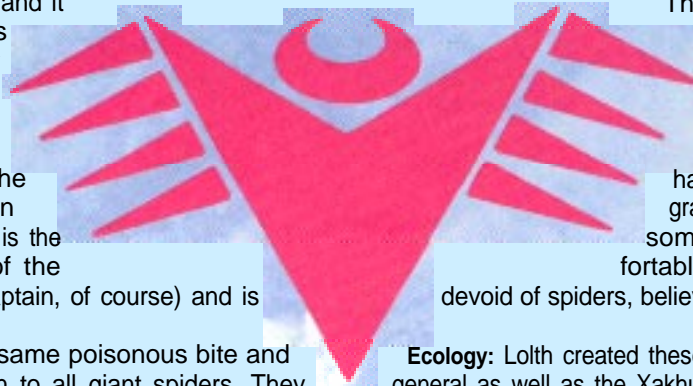
The Xakhun do not mistreat their spiders nor dispatch them without any thought to their retrieval. A Xakhun ship that loses its entire contingent of spiders (or never had one to begin with) has disgraced itself in the eyes of Lolth somehow. Xakhun are uncomfortable serving aboard a vessel devoid of spiders, believing the ship to be cursed.

Ecology: Lolth created these spiders to serve the drow in general as well as the Xakhun specifically. They are therefore found in drow cities and enclaves among the myriad other denizens and arachnids, usually at the beck and call of powerful drow priestesses. The chemical sacks of a *paralyzed* or *held* doomsider can be safely removed (although this process inevitably kills the creature) and then be used to create a powerful, portable explosive. Since the chemicals are individually safe, they can be transported in separate containers without fear of miscibility. The sacks and pads of the various web-spinning spiders can be used to create *potions of climbing* and *slippers of spider climbing*, while the legs of the sword spiders can be fashioned into ornate long swords (albeit with no special properties).

If Lolth believes that a Xakhun captain is mistreating her spiders, the demoness might command the captain's doomsider to explode in a manner that leaves the captain dead and the majority of the crew alive so that the survivors might consider the cause of their captain's misfortune.

Important Note:

Xakhun who have turned their backs on Lolth and have become privateers (or player characters) faithful to Eilistraee are unable to command or control any of Lolth's "children." In fact, spiders of all varieties attack these Xakhun on sight. Because the outcast Xakhun are hated so fiercely by Lolth's minions, they cannot benefit from the presence of spider riggers, web rigging, reinforced webbing in their windships, and so forth. Instead, they must rely more on conventional materials such as rope or sinew for the rigging and various earthly glues and pastes for sealing holes in the ship's membrane.





Terror from Above Contest

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Please limit entries to 1,000 words or less.

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"Terror From Above" Contest

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Entry Category: _____

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Old Snarl

by Ed Greenwood

illustrated by Storn Cook

THE NASTY BRUTALITY of this huge old red wyrm has become a watchword in the Sword Coast North, passing into common speech in such expressions as these: "Don't go near him early of mornings; he's apt to be a right Klauth until he's had a mug or two." Or, "Blood and bodies everywhere . . . it looked as though old Klauth himself had come calling!" Or the shorter variant (used to describe butchery): "Regular Klauth work!" The habitual facial expression of this much-scarred wyrm has won him the popular nickname of "Old Snarl."

Klauth is one of the largest and most fearsome red dragons ever to take wing in Faerûn. He spends his days brooding in grim suspicion or lashing out at other wyrms.

Velsaert of Baldur's Gate (the sage now recognized as an authority on dragonkind up and down the Sword Coast), describes Klauth as "A grim, nasty, awestringly HUGE old red dragon who has slain many rivals in a career spent on the attack, aggressively mauling everyone within reach."

The sage speculates that Klauth is extremely paranoid, always fearing that other dragons are rising to surpass him in power, and striking out at those he sees as rivals whenever he judges the time is right. Klauth has also been known to scatter armies, to land atop the orcs of a gathered horde and roll around (crushing thousands at a time), and to swoop down without warning to topple wizards' towers with their owners inside.

Only his unpredictability and great might have kept Klauth from being the sort of menace that archmages band together to track down and destroy in what is known as a Great Hunt. (Such undertakings have been the fate of several titanic beasts in recent centuries, such as the Anglatha of Tulmon, a magically-altered captive deepspawn that disgorged only beholders.) Only threats that seem likely to reach out and menace Klauth—principally other dragons—are themselves endangered by the Old Snarl.

As his string of triumphs mounts, however, Klauth's reputation becomes ever darker, and he may soon become the subject of the first Great Hunt in over eighty years. At least one mage of note, Malchor Harpell, has

called for Klauth's destruction after learning of the dragon's recent magical acquisitions. Klauth's response was to attack the Tower of Twilight, where the wyrm's massive bulk

almost carried him through its defensive web-like fields of crisscrossing lightning bolts before their combined effects caused his muscles to spasm so uncontrollably that his heart faltered and he could no longer beat his wings to fly. It is reported that Klauth flung himself to one side, crashed to the ground in the meadow below the tower pond, rolled away into the trees, and clawed himself aloft again, fleeing before the wizard could send any spells after him. This sort of sudden attack and disappearance is typical of Klauth's fighting style. Although he prefers to slay any foe he fights, he is not above deferring the threat they pose by inflicting as much damage as he can at no cost to himself, then disappearing before his foe can respond.

Old Snarl isn't an unrelenting destroyer of all he meets, however. He often obeys strange whims that lead him to acts of kindness or aid to creatures he doesn't think can harm him. One such recipient of this surprising charity was the elven sorceress Jhanandra, whom Klauth found weeping amid the ruins of an elven village she'd reached too late to defend against a brigand raid. In Jhanandra's arms was the only survivor of the attack, a dazed infant whose only kin dwelt in distant Evereska. The dragon flew both elves to Evereska cradled in his talons, "with a gentleness I'd hitherto known only from my own kind," Jhanandra reported. She described Klauth as having a huge bulk but graceful, supple movements, as if he were a hunting cat. His snout, head, and body were all covered in old, wicked-looking scars, where scales had been roughly torn away and had never grown back. Volo recorded the words of the sorceress but scoffed at her story. Elminster, however, sternly insists that the tale is true . . . and that the infant rescued that day is rising swiftly to greatness—and might soon be known to the Realms at large.

Klauth isn't known to have shown like kindnesses to other dragons. If he has ever mated, no one has taken note of it. Nor does he ever regard red she-wyrms with any visible romantic interest, though he did devour one once, in a roaring, cartwheeling

midair struggle above the roofs of Mirabar. Spectators report that Klauth seems to have deliberately initiated the conflict to enhance his reputation across the North.

Klauth is said to possess the usual vanity of his kind, though adventurers have failed to play upon it to goad him into foolish acts; he seems too wise and controlled to allow pride to blind him to perils or lure him into traps. He is also said to allow himself no true friends nor even, among dragons, acquaintances. His appearance in the sky sends most wyrms fleeing for cover as quickly as they can hurl themselves through the air. Thankfully for the general peace of the North, such appearances are few.

The key to Klauth's character could be said to be his constant anticipation of potential dangers and the formation of carefully-planned responses. Other wyrms might dream of past glories or future triumphs, but Old Snarl spends his time observing, judging potential rivals, and doing something about it. He's not above sneaking near a lair by nightfall and causing a rockslide to entomb a rival alive—or literally stealing magic from another dragon like a stealthy thief in the night. Klauth is said to be accomplished in the arts of creeping around with incredible stealth and silence for a being so large.

He's also widely (and Elminster says, correctly) believed to hunt for and devour the eggs and hatchlings of all sorts of dragons—except for red dragon eggs, which Klauth uses in a secret magical process to increase his size, health, and vigor. He seems an accomplished master in the art of tricking dragons out of their lairs (leaving offspring or eggs unguarded) so he can slip in and snatch away what he seeks.

On at least one memorable occasion, he failed in this task and was trapped in a cavern lair by its returning resident wyrm (the mist dragon Narnardinath, who dwelt in a Sword Coast shoreline cavern near the mouth of the Iceflow). Klauth brought down its roof to make his escape by deliberately ramming several natural stone pillars, shattering them with his bulk. The Bright Broadaxe, a band of adventurers from Neverwinter who'd crept into the cavern to explore, unaware that one dragon laired in the cave and another had stolen into it

before them, witnessed the collapse that slew Narnardinath. It took them hours of clambering over the loose rubble that buried the mist dragon and his hoard to find the way the battered red dragon had taken to the freedom of open air.

Even Elminster is a trifle hazy over just how Klauth discovered how to use red dragon eggs to make himself more mighty, but he knows what spell the much-scarred red wyrm employs to do so: a Netherese spell named *Thellar's argauneau*, after the mage who devised it (an archsorcerer who delighted in "bettering" dragons with his experiments, over a long career that produced two-headed dragons and several more stable subspecies).

Klauth's Lair

Klauth was sorely wounded on the fourth day of Mirtul in the Year of the Turret, when he was ambushed by two white dragons and a blue dragon working together. The four wyrms engaged in a spectacular aerial battle that raged across the skies of the Sword Coast North from the Iceflow to the Fell Pass. Though Klauth did slay all three of his attackers and wasted no time in seizing the hoard of the vanquished blue dragon Ildrithkryn, he then went into hiding. Elminster explains that according to an awed young apprentice mage who was practicing his scrying spells near Neverwinter, Old Snarl came out of that battle with one wing almost torn off and a great gaping hole in his side: almost half of his body had been frozen solid, shattered, and then struck away.

No one saw just where the crippled wyrm flew, nor the landing that almost slew him. Klauth used all of his hoarded and freshly seized magic to keep himself alive and to build a lair in which to hide away and heal. He chose a narrow, winding chasm in the mountains east of Raven Rock, an unnamed, isolated valley that he filled with sheep, goats, and rothe seized from all over the North. There he yet abides among his ready supply of food, building his strength and practicing his spells, awaiting the day when he'll be powerful enough to sally forth as the unquestioned master of northern dragonkind.

That day might never come; Klauth has become a wyrm who sees rising rivals in every other dragon who has

broken out of its egg—and his paranoia is not soothed by the many monsters and adventurers who enter his valley to help themselves to the ready food.

From these intruders, however, Klauth has gained many magical items, among them several wands. By working on magic of his own and employing a key spell stolen from the desert dragon lymrith, he has managed to mount the wands in his wings and establish mental control over them so that he can “fire” them as he flies. In this way he has surprised and slain a flying mage and two intruding dragons who were expecting to deal with only a red dragon’s breath weapon and perhaps a spell or two. The bodies of the dragons are believed to lie where they crashed: in the depths of the tiny but very deep Orothryn’s Well, a pond at the heart of Klauth’s little valley.

Word of “Klauthen Vale” is now spreading across the North from the taverns of Mirabar, and adventurers may soon become a real headache for Klauth. His hoard is of legendary size, and folk say (accurately) that despite his advancing age, Old Snarl still leaves the valley from time to time to smite potential rivals and to search for the hoards of the two white dragons he slew in the great battle (Aerihykloarara and Ruuthundrarar, both of whom seem to have used several resting-caverns but who kept their treasure hidden elsewhere).

Klauthen Vale isn’t known to have any traps or guardians beyond its famous owner (who is known to lie sometimes on a ledge high on one of its walls, from whence he can strike at intruders on the valley floor). The Vale walls are broken by several natural caves, at least two of which are large enough for Klauth to shelter in. He keeps his hoard in a small, simple network of tunnels beneath one cavern. The only entrance to this subterranean complex is by lifting a huge slab of stone—a task only creatures as large and as strong as dragons can easily manage.

Klauth's Domain

Klauth doesn’t defend or patrol a territory the way many dragons do; he regards himself as free to roam wherever he desires on his rare forays out of the Vale. This isn’t to say he doesn’t recognize that sightseeing over

Waterdeep or lymrith’s desert city would be both dangerous and imprudent. He invades the domains of other dragons only for specific reasons and performs the tasks he sets for himself as quickly and as efficiently as possible. He acts not out of fear but out of the prudence that has become a foundation of his character.

The Deeds of Klauth

Klauth spends most of his waking time scrying the Realms around him with his spells. He probably knows more about the deeds and whereabouts of surface-world creatures in the Sword Coast North than any other being alive today. Moreover, Old Snarl thinks more about what he sees than most who spy by means of magic; he’s seldom looking for just one thing or person, and he has the wits (and experience in their use) to assess problems and reason them through without hesitation. Seeing carts being loaded with swords in one spot sends him looking for activity among armorers in all the places to which those carts could logically be headed. A mustering of forces in a merchant company compound or noble villa brings his full attention to bear upon the purpose of that activity, and the potential results.

Klauth’s expertise on the activities and behavior of others in the North is as formidable a weapon as the jets of fire and beams of magic that spurt forth from his wings as he swoops down on foes . . . *almost*. It also gives him something quite valuable to bargain with when dealing with foes he’d rather not challenge; Old Snarl is thought to have come to a “live and let live” agreement with Alustriel of the Seven in this manner.

Klauth's Magic

Old Snarl is thought to have a generous number of magic items and known spells. Although it’s certain he possesses more wands than his wings usually sport, changing them is a long and tiresome matter of linking and controlling spells that must be broken and then cast anew. From many accounts (given by adventurers, mages, and observers Volo judged not to be fabricating or exaggerating too badly), a tentative “roster” of the wing-wands employed by Klauth can be assembled. It’s important to remember that the wing-wand list given here is quite likely to contain one or more errors.

On Klauth’s left wing (on an opponent’s right as the dragon swoops down):

1. **Outermost:** *wand of frost*
2. **Mid-mount:** *wand of fire*
3. **Innermost:** *wand of polymorphing*

On Klauth’s right wing (on an opponent’s left as the dragon swoops down):

4. **Outermost:** *wand of paralyzation*
5. **Mid-mount:** *wand of lightning*
6. **Innermost:** *wand of flame extinguishing*

The linkages Klauth has established (by still-secret spells developed by the old wyrm) enable him to employ multiple *trptych* spells to activate wands #1, #2, and #4 in unison, or trigger wands #3, #5, and #6 together.

These triptych spells come from an original that Klauth stole from the desert-dwelling dragon lymrith (a magic possibly Netherese in origin, and presumably named for its creator), which follows hereafter. According to Cadella Thylight, a priestess of Mystra interviewed by Volo in Waterdeep, a version of this magic usable by a human or demi-human would be a spell of at least eighth level.

Theller's Arganeau

(Alteration, Necromancy)

Level: 3

Range: Touch

Components: V, S, M

Duration: Permanent

Casting Time: 1 round

Area of Effect: Special

Saving Throw: Special

This spell transforms a fertile red dragon egg into life energy and then infuses it into a living creature in direct contact with the egg during casting. The spell fails and is wasted if the dragon egg is infertile, derived from another subspecies than red, or more than one living creature (besides the caster) is in contact with it when spellcasting ends. (The spellcaster can be the only recipient of the dragon egg energy.)

A spell recipient who is a red dragon can immediately decide to have the energy do one of three things: heal 5d6 hp damage (of any sort, working against even withering, life energy

draining, or flesh corrosion); temporarily raise the dragon one age category in powers (this effect lasts for 10 hours and can be made cumulative if the dragon has access to multiple eggs and *argauneau* spells); or cause the instant return of all spells previously cast by the dragon, in reverse order until the dragon's "roster" of spells is complete. The choice must be made immediately, is irrevocable, and takes effect one round later.

If the recipient of the life energy is a non-red dragon, a weredragon, a creature related to dragons (a wyvern, for example), or is another sort of creature who has assumed dragon-form by any means, the energy instantly heals 4d6 hp of any sort of damage but can have no other effect.

If the recipient of the life energy is any other sort of creature, a saving throw vs. poison must be made. If it fails, the energy dissipates into the recipient body, causing 4d6 hp damage and causing the body to convulse uncontrollably (-2 penalty to Armor Class, no deliberate actions possible) for one round.

If the saving throw succeeds, the spell recipient gains 3d6 hp to offset any damage he might be suffering; any excess hit points remain for 10 hours before fading. In any case, a second saving throw (vs. spell, this time) must be made. Failure means no further effect, but if it succeeds, one additional hit point is permanently gained.

Alaunghaer's Enchanted Triptych

(Alteration, Evocation)

Level: 5

Range: 0

Components: V

Duration: 1 round

Casting Time: 1

Area of Effect: Three magic items

Saving Throw: Special

This spell allows its caster simultaneously to trigger three magical items that the caster is touching, carrying, or wearing. All of the affected items operate in the same round and can direct their effects at different targets if desired.

The triptych spell enables its caster to precisely aim and control all three items, whatever their usual requirements as to attention, handling, and the identity of the user, but prohibits

the triptych-caster from casting other spells, triggering other magical items, or using other voluntary spell-like powers (such as a breath weapon) in the same round that the *triptych* is cast. Attempts to do so expend and waste the *triptych* spell.

Ongoing (previously launched) or automatic magics can still function without ruining the *triptych* magic. If the caster was already water breathing, he can continue to do so; if he is falling and wears a ring of *feather falling*, it operates normally without affecting the operation of the *triptych*. Magical item effects can continue beyond the round in which the *triptych* activates them if they normally do so, or are directed to do so. In other words, use of a *triptych* can't cause a wand to activate once per round for several rounds thereafter but can cause it to immediately activate once with an effect that lasts beyond the round in which the *triptych* spell awakens it.

This spell can never be used to allow its caster to evoke multiple magical effects from the same item if it isn't designed to operate in that manner, nor can it be used to compel or make possible the simultaneous casting of multiple spells by the *triptych*-caster or any other being. If the caster of this spell has more than three magical items available to him when the spell is cast, he must deliberately choose and think of the items he desires to control. Note that the *triptych* magic doesn't identify items to him that he may not know possess magical powers, nor does it make clear the functioning and control of any unfamiliar magic item; to avoid disasters, a *triptych* is best used with magical items already familiar to the caster.

A triptych is a very complex and delicate piece of magic; even though it may be perfectly cast, there is always a small chance that one or two of the three magical items won't be awakened by the spell. Whenever a *triptych* is cast, roll 1d12. A result of 1 means that such a malfunction has occurred; a second die should then be rolled, with an even number result meaning two items did not work, and an odd number meaning that only one item failed to respond. (There are no known instances of a *triptych* spell causing a magic item to explode, lose

its enchantment, fire wildly, or turn its effects upon its wielder.)

Khelben "Blackstaff" Arunsun of Waterdeep has been heard to observe that any human mage who gained full control over a *triptych* magic would have to be destroyed, along with all copies of the spell, "for the safety of Toril, and all creatures in it." Upon hearing of this, Elminster observed, "We'd better not tell him what my Queen of Aglarond can do, then."

Klauth's Fate

Old Snarl is less likely to die by misadventure than most dragons. Enfeeblement (old age), disease, or a cabal of foes acting together are the dooms most likely to claim him. The last-mentioned cause would probably involve a titanic battle; the others might strike silently or might goad Klauth into one last grand, suicidal flight of destruction across the North.

In any case, once word spreads of the passing of Old Snarl, Klauthen Vale is likely to see a "gold rush" of adventurers hungry for wealth and mages hungry for magic like no other in the modern North. If even one of these seekers recovers an intact *triptych* spell, well . . . as Elminster has observed, "Twill be a mite too late, then, for the traditional tactic of 'standing back and looking the other way.'"



Ed Greenwood likes to go up to his cottage in the northern woods and relax with a good book atop a lofty rock that looks very much like the battlements of ruined Castle Grimstead in Shadowdale. He was quite startled one afternoon when Laeral, the Lady Mage of Waterdeep, stepped out of a nearby stone, winked at him, turned into a falcon, and flew away. Her appearance did help to explain the two piles of paperbacks he'd found when opening up the cottage one spring, labeled in flowing handwriting: "Utter Trash" and "Garbage, but I Liked Them." He reports that Elminster always picks "Utter Trash" books and ignores the other pile.



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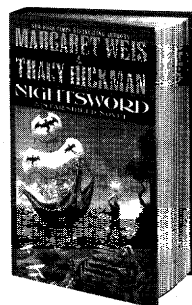
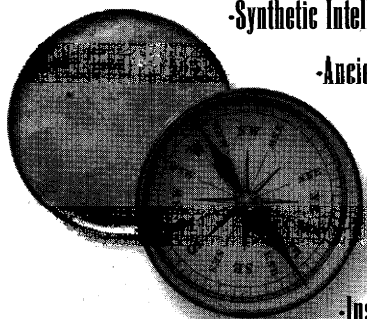
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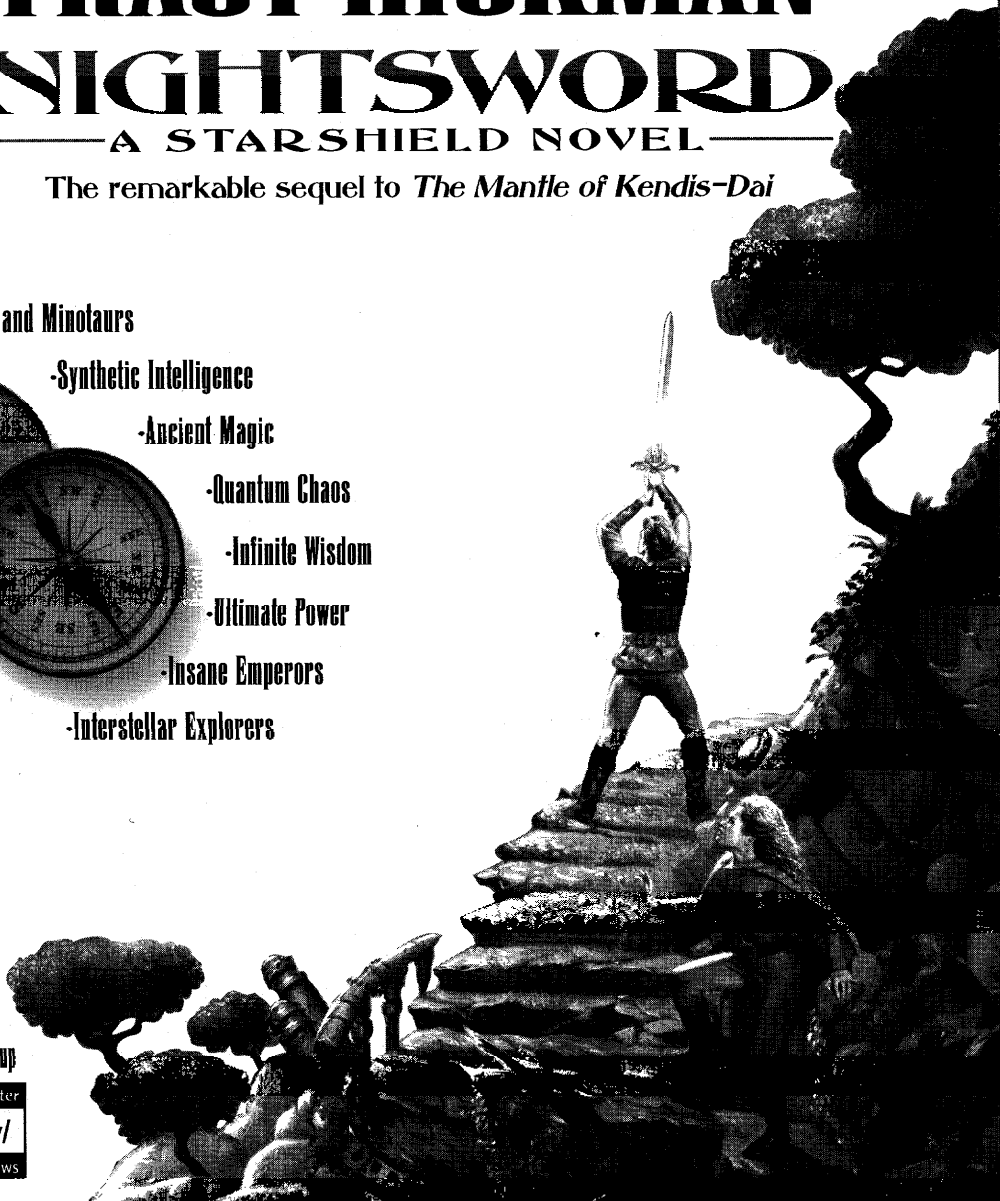
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The Red Wyvern

Katherine Kerr
Bantam Books

\$12.95

At the heart of *The Red Wyvern* is a civil war waged in the land of Deverry—the same realm featured in *Days of Blood and Fire*, *Days of Air and Darkness*, and other Katherine Kerr novels. Prince Maryn, the rightful ruler, tries to wring Deverry from the grasp of the usurper-king, Burcan the Boar. The unfolding conflict provides an excellent backdrop for the novel's lavish characters, among them the villainous Merodda. Burcan's conniving sister proves a delightful villain. Part viper, part Lady Macbeth, Merodda helps secure her brother's place on the throne by poisoning his enemies and using her magic to eavesdrop on those who will inevitably defy him. Merodda's daughter, Lillorigga, flees Deverry before the war, allying herself with those loyal to Prince Maryn. Lilli's scrying powers are just beginning to manifest themselves. Fearful of her

treacherous mother, Lilli confides in a dweomermaster named Nevyn. Nevyn is a pivotal figure whose invocations turn the tide of battle and whose wisdom provides important insights in the darkest moments of the war.

The war becomes a series of engaging conflicts. When one of Prince Maryn's captains is slain in battle, the reader feels the anger of his men as they watch the enemy display their captain's severed head on the castle wall. When Burcan is injured in the battle for Dun Deverry, the reader feels sympathy for the wounded villain. There are unpredictable moments when a character dies, and moments where a character acts decisively and the reader bears witness to the consequences. Some rather shocking consequences, actually.

The war itself is the story's obvious highlight. The author moves fluidly from one side of the battlefield to the other, showing the strain on both sides. There's barbarism, noble sacrifice, and the death of innocence within opposing forces. The battle scenes are visceral, engaging, believably violent, and handled with epic flair. The disintegrating shield-walls, the falling bastions, the surge of the gate-rams, and the images of flocking red wyvern banners make the siege of Dun Deverry a visual experience.

The Dragon Mage series spans several points throughout Deverry's history, but in this first novel, making the leap between time frames is difficult. Each time period introduces new characters, and it isn't always clear that these characters are actually reincarnations of characters from earlier periods in Deverry's past. For instance, Merodda is reincarnated as Mallona, and later as Raena, but it's too early to

know how closely these incarnations will overlap, or what impact they will have on one another. The prologue and epilogue clearly harken to periods described more fully in later novels, but many of these bridges are still under construction. *The Red Wyvern* braces us for things to come but does not entirely prepare us for them. Thankfully, the characters from the period of Deverry's civil war are rich and memorable. It will be interesting to see what befalls them in other lifetimes.

As a roleplaying resource, *The Red Wyvern* provides Dungeon Masters with a wealth of ideas for running and detailing adventures around "the castle siege," particularly in the BIRTHRIGHT® setting where kingdoms rise and fall like the sun.

—CHRIS PERKINS

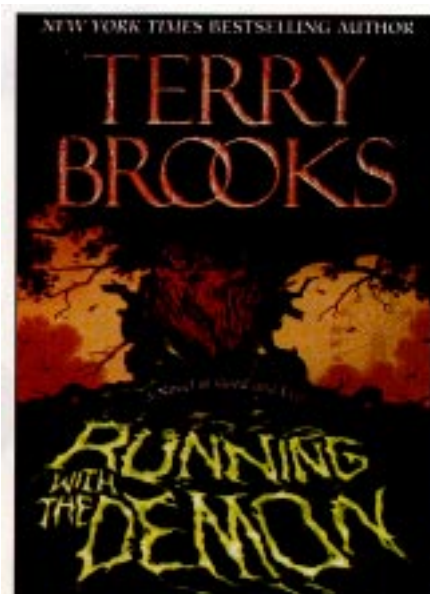
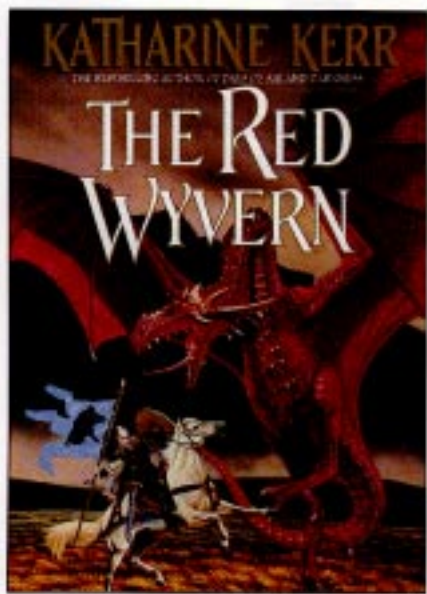
Running with the Demon

Terry Brooks
Del Rey

\$25.95

Terry Brooks new novel, *Running with the Demon*, is a departure from his popular *Shanara* series. *Running with the Demon* chronicles a powerful struggle between good and evil set in the modern world.

Good is embodied by the Word, and evil by the Void. The Word is the purpose behind all things; the Void is the equally strong force trying to destroy all things. The real world exists, and runs as it is supposed to, when the two forces are in balance. The key players in the struggle are Demons, humans who have given themselves wholly to the Void, and



the Knights of the Word, humans chosen to serve the Word. In between these powerful figures lie people like Nest Freemark, people who can use magic and have the potential to do great good or great evil depending on the choices they make.

John Ross, Knight of the Word, travels to Nest's home town to stop her from being tricked by a Demon into serving the void. The price John must pay for his knightly powers is steep. John Ross can see the future. He can see how things will turn out if the Void succeeds in its attempts to overthrow the balance. John's visions of the future heighten the tension throughout the story; John knows that failing to help Nest keep away from the Demon could mean the end of humanity. These two protagonists, John and Nest, complement each other well. John's struggle to prevent events that have already happened is mirrored nicely in Nest's own desire to learn who her father was.

Running with the Demon combines strong foreshadowing, realistic characters, and an interesting setting into an enjoyable read. Although the book suffers from predictability, Brooks finishes the novel exceptionally well, and it is sure to attract many fans.

-JESSE DECKER

The Dragon and the Gnarly King

Gordon R. Dickson

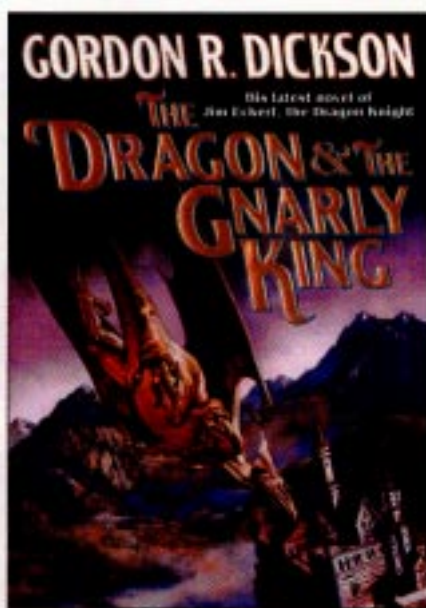
Tor

\$24.95

The Dragon and the Gnarly King is the third book in a series that began in 1976 with the World Fantasy Award-winning *The Dragon and the George*. This series is a must for any fan of medieval fantasy.

In the tradition of *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, Jim Eckert, a modern-day American, has been transported back in time to feudal England—but this is an England where magic works. Eckert is a novice magician who is reluctant to use his powers.

In *The Dragon and the Gnarly King*, Eckert is now Sir James, Baron de Bois de Malencontri et Riveroak, a knight with his own castle. The wizard Carolinus, one of only three AAA+ magicians in the world and Eckert's mentor, charges Sir James with maintaining King Edward on the throne and with rescuing the baby Robert, a ward of Eckert and his 20th-century wife, Angela.



Eckert sets out on a 14th-century quest with his best friends, Sir Brian Neville-Smythe, warrior extraordinaire, and Dafydd ap Hywel a mighty archer. The three are joined by an assortment of magical beings including a friendly sea devil and a hobgoblin.

The adventurers travel to strange lands, including the dangerous Kingdom of Lyonesse. Throughout the story, Dickson balances action, armed encounters, evil beings, and political intrigue with the wonders of magic—especially when the magician, Sir Jim, doesn't always know what he is doing.

This is a novel written with tongue placed lightly in cheek. Some of the more delightful scenes occur when Eckert and Angela must deal with 14th-century behavior. In one such scene, Jim has problems convincing a servant that a sound beating is *not* the best way to improve another servant's memory.

The Dragon and the Gnarly King is an enjoyable romp through a world of chivalry and magic.

—PIERCE WATERS

War of the Gods

Poul Anderson

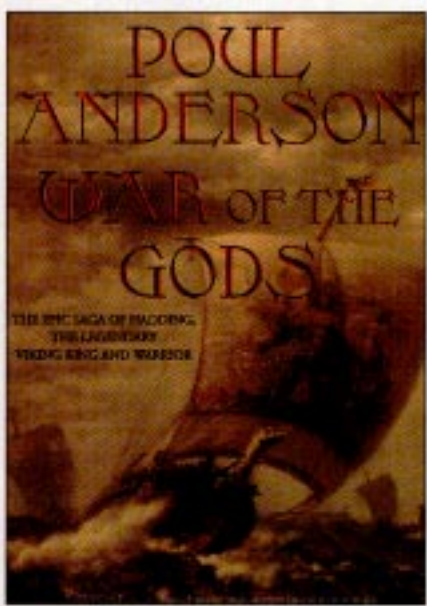
Tor

\$22.95

One of the masters of fantasy and science fiction now turns his talents to a retelling of Scandinavian legend. Revealing the story of Hadding is no mean feat, for unlike Arthur, the Danish king has enjoyed relatively few chronicles. Starting with the few written legends that exist, Anderson adds liberal doses of revised Norse mythology to create the "complete" legend of Hadding in *War of the Gods*.

As the second son of a king embroiled in war, Hadding is fostered by giants who owe a debt to the boy's father. Among the giants, Hadding learns something of dark magic, though he himself does not indulge in it so wantonly as his ill-fated companion, the giantess Hardgreip.

After leaving the giants, Hadding meets a one-eyed stranger who prophesies great deeds in the young man's future. The stranger's identity is no mystery to those with even a passing familiarity with Norse mythology, and he assists his charge in much the same way Athena guides Odysseus in *The Odyssey*. Fortunately for those who like their heroes to achieve their own victories, the divine guidance abates long enough for Hadding to make his own conquests, proving his battle-prowess and king-craft through his own strength and wisdom.



Anderson's prose is muscular and poetic, comfortably echoing the Norse bards without sacrificing the clarity demanded by today's readers. The narrative evokes the wintry landscape of the Danes, while the dialogue is, like the characters, timeless and larger than life.

War of the Gods blends the best of history and mythology. Anderson deftly weaves full-blown fantasy with documented chronicle to elevate Hadding to his rightful place, firmly beside Arthur and Beowulf.

-DAVE GROSS







Michaelene Pendleton

Artwork by Karl Waller

I SHOULD HAVE LISTENED to my mother. She told me to marry a farmer and be content with raising children and rutabagas. Or join a convent. Or a brothel. Anything rather than training to be a soulkeeper. She said soulkeeping was a hard and dangerous life with few comforts, low pay, little respect, and not much prospect of living to a comfortable old age. She was right.

When I find someone riding as far north as our high-mountain stading, I send Mother a message full of comforting half-truths and outright lies. I assure her that my witch does not take too much from me, nor does she weight me with more than I can bear.

I don't tell her that the witch whose soul I keep is a drunk. A rowdy, roistering, lying, conniving, lecherous, arrogant, gambling drunk, at that. Sithi, sober, is a generous woman, an excellent witch, a good mistress. Sithi, drunk, is a disaster lurking round each corner. Sithi is all those things. I have learned to love her.

Sitting hunched over a low table, the sleeves of my new emerald silk tunic sodden with spilled beer, breathing in greasy smoke and the stench of wet wool and bodies that bathed only when caught in the rain, one hand on my cup and the other on my knife, snarling at the tavern dregs who thought to lay hands on me, I did not love Sithi.

Everyone else in the dirty, flea-ridden, stinking riverfront tavern loved Sithi. In the shank end of a cold, drizzling autumn night, when the moon and all the decent sober citizens had gone to bed, Sithi was aflame with dangerous possibilities. Light from the cheap tallow candles caught in her russet hair, spread a nacreous luster over her fair skin, created shadows in the kohl-lined green of her long Pathan eyes, flashed from the golden bangles around her slim ankles, rippled and ran like water from the amber satin that clung to her smooth arms and rounded breasts. Not a man there but would have given everything in his purse to have her.

Most of the patrons of the Skelly's Tail had already given more than their purses in pursuit of one excitement or another. Eyepatches, missing thumbs and teeth and ears, legs carved of wood or bone ivory, hardly a man in the place was whole. Wearing silks and damask brocades, leather and ragged pieces of ringmail and mismatched armor, rough woolens and fine linens so grained with filth that the original color was in doubt, bedecked with enough jewels to make a dowager blush, they were just exactly the kind of lowlife scum that Sithi loves. We could have been lying on soft couches, being hand-fed sweetmeats by sloe-eyed nubile boys and girls, drinking frail Thalesian wine from the Ahkim's own table. Sithi chose instead to spend the evening in the Tail, carousing and gambling tantalizing every man there with half-made promises she had no intention of fulfilling.

In place of the Ahkim's palace or the Skelly's Tail, rather would I have chosen a cozy little inn with good ale, hot stew, a jovial paunchy innkeeper, and a soft bug-free bed where I could lie next to Haaken's long body and play a game of a different sort. But where

the witch or wizard goes, also goes the soulkeeper. That is our job. Our trust.

So I sat in sullen impatience, trying to keep Haaken awake enough to guard our backs as he was supposed to be paid two gold ryals every new moon to do, trying to hold on to my temper while Sithi wagered and lost our hard-earned coin, and trying to keep my sense of humor from fraying completely to rags. Mother also said that I take life too seriously. She was probably right about that, as well.

But I loathe rutabagas, so there you are.

They say everyone loves a winner. Maybe so, but losers love another loser. They can feel better about their own cramped, twisted lives when they watch someone else being shaken and wrung dry.

Sithi played to their avid lust, both for her and for the game. Her long fingers caressed the dice cup, shaking it, rolling the brass rune-marked dice around its rim, almost spilling them, then tilting the cup upright until the circle of watchers leaned forward, breathless, silently urging her to scatter the dice and lay another stone on the wall of their lives. Most of them bet against her. They won.

I watched, tight-lipped, as Sithi laughed and sparkled for them, inevitably losing every last copper earned with Haaken's blood, my nerves, and her talent. Her opponent was a night-skinned witch from the eastern desert, a tall, lean woman with a shaven skull and limbs like a leopard: Drusa her name, a water witch with sharp white teeth and unholy luck with the dice.

With Sithi's last losing throw, the entire sum of our fortune lay within the circle of Drusa's long, dark arms. Grinning, the water witch ran her fingers through the pile of gold and copper coins. "Luck didn't favor you tonight, shapeshifter."

Sithi was having trouble focusing, her hands swinging wide of her beer cup and grasping at air. Her lush, plum-dark lips stretched into a foolish smile. "Let's play again."

"You have no coin left to wager."

Sithi turned her lambent gaze on me. I shook my head. "No, Sithi. I have just enough to pay for a warm bed, and you're not getting it."

Sithi's head tilted upward on her long, white neck.

Above us, his voice coming from the cobwebs of the low-raftered ceiling, Haaken echoed, "I have nothing, Mistress." He forbore to mention that Sithi had just lost his wages.

Drusa laughed. "No luck, no coin, and poor friends. A situation not likely to change unless you're a better witch than you are a gambler." And because she had made them winners, the crowd around us laughed with her. Drusa jingled Sithi's lost coin. "I'll be glad to give you lessons in both when I am again in need of money."

Sithi lost her smile. "I need no lessons in witchery from an illusionist, water witch."

Drusa's breath hissed through her sharp teeth. Her eyes went flat as a desert viper's. "Illusionist? Maybe so, but I need no cats-paw to remind me that I am human. Without your soulkeeper, what are you,

shapeshifter? Only an animal, lost in your spell. Without your soulkeeper, you are nothing." She caught her thumbnail behind her front teeth and flicked it at Sithi.

Stools creaked, onlookers shifted. I edged back from the table. Behind me, I felt Haaken tighten up. Light trembled on the blades of his axe. The tavernkeeper started gathering up his few pieces of glassware.

If Sithi hadn't been quite so drunk, she might have settled it right there with fists and teeth and nails. Drusa was ready, you could see it in her tensed body, her eager eyes. Her guard, a gap-toothed mass of muscle lacking Haaken's inches but outweighing him by two stone, was ready, his hands tight on his iron-spiked mace as he measured Haaken with a squinty grin.

Sithi put both hands flat on the table. "Nothing?" she asked sweetly. She wiggled her right thumb, flashing blood red light from a ruby the size of a kite's egg. "Nothing, you say? Why, then, do I wear the Ahkim's jewel? I see no rubies on your hands."

"The wheel turns. Everyone gets lucky now and then."

"Lucky?" Sithi fairly sputtered the word. "On my bad days, I'm twice the witch you are!"

Drusa bared her pointed teeth in something that might be called a smile. "Prove it."

Sithi raised her arms in a sensuous stretch, lifted her heavy hair off her neck, and let her eyes wander around the circle, telling each man there that he was the one she wanted. As she brought her gaze back to Drusa, you could see that she had once lived inside a serpents skin. "You think to set me a test? What can you offer to make it worth my while?"

Drusa's flat yellow stare was entirely sober. "All that I have."

I have no magical talent, but I know truth when I hear it. Every hair on my neck bristled. This was what the water witch had been dicing for; all our gold was only the bait she tossed before Sithi. I touched Sithi's cheek, calling her to look at me. "Sithi," I murmured, "there's something wrong here. Don't do this."

She might have heard me, she may have seen me, but I might as well have been the wind for all the notice Sithi took of me. She answered Drusa with a throaty laugh. "All that you have isn't worth the jewel on my thumb."

Eyes heavy-lidded, Drusa looked down her falcon's nose at Sithi, her mouth twisting with the bitterness of green figs. "Maybe not, but no one can offer more. If you won't take that bet, then I say it's because your courage is as weak as puppy-piss. I'd heard you had no nerve, shapeshifter, but while I know you to be inept, I'd not believed you a coward as well."

Any fly-plagued urchin in the marketplace could have seen through Drusa's ploy; sober, Sithi would have seen it. But Sithi was not sober. She leaned farther over the rough, scarred table, barely a hand's length from the water witch. Each word hissed to a stop before the next one began. "You and all your kind tied together in a bundle for pig food couldn't set a task I fear to try. You seek to test me? Name it."

Haaken and I groaned in harmony at the curl of Drusa's smile. Then I ordered two large bowls of camel stew and started eating.



Haaken has a good mind and a brave liver inside all that blond hair and bronzed muscle, but he is a man of the pack-ice fjords, holding his thoughts close. Usually I have no such constraints, but huddled cold and wet inside a dark corner of the sigil-carved wall around the house of the Sorcerer Ascendant of the local Thaumaturgy Guild, awaiting a certain fate that would make death seem a blessing, I loved Sithi so little that I had no heart even to rage at her.

The Pantalogue, Drusa wanted. The one Word that would revert any shapeshifter to human form, reverse any spell. Sober, minus her ruby which had gone to a skinny beetle of a rockwizard for a Sphere of Defense and a spell to get us inside the House Ascendants wards, even Sithi should know the hopelessness of the task. What use, then, in speaking of it? I pulled my hood closer, wishing the rockwizard's spell hadn't worked, wishing we were scuttling along the trail to another city, any other city, and waited for Sithi to think up something brilliant that would get us out of this alive.

Our only luck in this business was the conservative, stodgy nature of wizards who have made it to the top. Since anyone with a thumbnail's worth of sense knows it is suicide to annoy the Sorcerer Ascendant, sometimes he gets lazy, resting on his reputation instead of renewing his wards. Raisneev has been the top wand waver for a dozen years now, and he is not only a sour old pucker of a man, he is also arrogant. That Raisneev declines to vary his habits and hosts the rest of the Guild for a feast on dark of the moon gave us a chance of getting to the Pantalogue during the general revelry.

Drenched, her hair stringing down her face, Sithi's eyes sparkled with a wicked delight repeated in her grin. There's no love lost between wizards and witches. Besting Raisneev could do a lot for a witch's reputation. Or at least guarantee a memorably spectacular funeral. Sithi would happily settle for either one.

If I somehow survived her, it would be back to the rutabaga fields for me. No one hires a dead shapeshifter's soulkeeper. It's a one-woman job.

From our quiet corner, we watched the Sorcerers Guild wizards arriving, each with his grimoire and familiar, wands held ceremonially in the crooks of their arms, proud in their black satin and jewels, pacing with dignified formality along the paved walkway from the gate into the golden light of Raisneev's tiled and silk-hung arched and embellished palace. At the main door, two leopards, chained with gold, were held in trembling check by a lithe yellow-skinned man as their slit-eyed gazes measured and found wanting all who entered. The aroma of roast pig set my mouth to watering and I heard Haaken's stomach growl.

The Sorcerer Ascendant held many treasures inside his compound walls. His gardens boasted trees that

grew lemons and pomegranates on the same branch, and sprouted venomous black orchids lurking in clumps of gray moss. Blue-eyed birds with rainbow feathers nested and sang siren songs that turned to stone the unwary, whose eroding statues lumped here and there throughout the compound. Fountains spouted water from the mouths of gargoyles and hydras into pools where delicate sun-scaled fish flashed among white lotus pads, and reflected shards of light from glowing globes that wafted about the grounds. Stables that were themselves palaces sheltered his long-necked horses. An iron-barred seraglio where eunuchs, armed with more than enough weaponry to make up for that which they had lost, guarded long-necked beauties of another kind.

There, too, was a place I had never wanted to see this close—the Chrestomathy of Lost Souls, the zoo housing shapeshifters whose soulkeepers had made seriously bad mistakes, usually involved with being killed, while the shapeshifters were in animal form. They looked at us with their beast eyes, pacing their cages, made restive by our presence. I made a good luck sign at them and kissed my serpent amulet. I don't often pray to the Cloud Snake, but I said a couple of fervent words then. I felt their yearning gazes on our backs as we slipped from shadow to rain-washed shadow across the compound to a niche between two windows in the palace walls.

Above us towered a minaret, its parapet barred with filigreed ironwork and ringed with a smoth, slick mosaic depicting the Fall of Stars. Tucking his axe in his belt, Haaken fingered the wall, searching for climbing holds. After a few attempts, he shook his head.

Sithi nodded. She stroked her neck, rubbing her thumb over the blue Sunspider tattoo in the hollow of her throat. She looked at the wall, then at me. The rueful twist of her lips told me I wasn't going to like this. She dropped her cloak and drew her long dress over her head. Naked and goose-bumped in the cold rain, Sithi leaned forward, her voice a bare puff of breath in my ear as she gave me the Words that would return her to human form, Words that would blessedly leave my mind as soon as they were spoken. More Words she said then, an incantation that transformed her into a Ligerian Mantis, better than three stones' weight of lethal insect.

The other seventy pounds of Sithi's sultry body flowed along with her human soul into me. Haaken caught me as I collapsed under the weight, while Sithi's image morphosed into angular green legs, a flat, thin body, and a triangular head with huge orange pinpoint-pupilled eyes. Her head flicked to look at us, heavy forearms snapped close to her chest, pincers scissoring open and shut. Haaken and I held ourselves quiet until Sithi's mind overrode the mantis' predatory instincts. When she was in control, Sithi took Haaken's climbing rope in one chitinous appendage. She placed her forelegs on the wall and began to climb, a nightmare silhouetted against the beauty of the mosaic.

Haaken eased me down to rest against his bent knee, arching my back to make breathing easier as I wheezed under the weight that Sithi had shed to become the mantis. The big-boned sturdy frame that I had bemoaned as a young girl enabled me to carry the weight, as well as giving Sithi substance when she went larger. But it was never easy. Haaken's hand rested lightly on my shoulder and he kissed the top of my head, a welcome encouragement while I huffed for air, my loose tunic and pants stretched to the seams.

Sithi scritchd up the wall, a series of six-legged dartings that raised the hair on my neck. At the parapet, she delicately climbed over the iron railings and disappeared inside the minaret. From the Chrestomathy, a forlorn howl drifted into the night.

Sithi reappeared on the parapet. Her command lanced into my mind like heat lightning. Gratefully, I whispered the Words.

Folk who say that something was like a weight lifted from their backs have no idea of how that really feels. As Sithi reformed into her human shape, the weight was lifted not only from my back, but from the rest of me as well. I felt as if I would float away without Haaken's hand holding me down.

Sithi tied off the rope then tossed the end down to us. Haaken took a strain on the rope. I climbed up his body, found a grip on the knots, and swarmed up the tower, Sithi's clothes slung over my shoulder. While she dressed, Haaken over-handed his way up to join us.

I took a breath, and Sithi laid two fingers across my lips, forestalling any sound. She jerked her head and we followed her, creeping silently down the spiral steps from the top of the minaret to a doorway screened with lace-carved cedar. Golden light shafted through the screen's openwork, while laughter and music and the aromas of food and smoldering frankincense arose from the open atrium below us. There Sithi whispered, "Only one guard patrols this level. They pay him no mind. Be silent about it."

Haaken nodded. With one ice-blue eye pressed to the screen, he said, "I see him."

Very soon we could hear him as well, hard leather bootheels clacking with authority as he made his rounds. As he got closer, my stomach drew tighter. Sithi loves danger. I get nauseous and tremble a lot. Haaken just does his job.

When the guard was on top of us, Haaken pushed open the door, hefted his axe, and as the guard's mouth gaped in surprise, punched him solidly in the abdomen with the axe's weighted head. The guard went down with no more than a whuff of expelled breath, boneless as an eel. Not easy to down a man in silence, but Haaken's skill comes from brain as well as muscle. I could not love a stupid man. While Haaken bound and gagged the guard, I crept to the balcony railing and in the shadow of a marble column carved with grape leaves, I raised my head to peer down on the wizards' feast.

I'd always wondered what transpired when the highest wizards of the land gathered for an evening's

entertainment. What arcane devisings, what thaumaturgical embellishments, what transmundane fantasies did they create for their pleasure? Surely their pastimes would blast the eyes from an uninitiate's head. Part of me feared to look. The other part of me that would gaze on Abbadon itself just to know, looked.

They could have been grain merchants or minor princes of a tired dynasty, or any seven of the denizens of the Skelly's Tail with more money and less taste. They sat each with his own chair and table carved and inlaid with garish jewels to proclaim their status, up to their elbows in pig grease, their beards trailing in their plates, their hats askew and the sleeves of their robes rolled up, swilling wine and spilling most of it as they waved their golden cups at a sloe-eyed woman with cinnamon lips and hair like the fall of night, as she undulated her way around the open space in the middle of their gathering in a dance of stomping high-arched bare feet, clapping hands and twitching hips to the coiling music of drum and rebec and sistrum. Their familiars were aloof, uninvolved with the animal appetites of their masters as they prowled, skittered, crawled, or lazed about the room, each to its own nature, furred, feathered, or scaled.

In a far corner at the foot of the stairs slept a huge black she-wolf, hairy stomach bulging with food, her legs twitching in dreams. Sithi grinned and started shucking her clothes again.



The wolf and Sithi were of a weight so I followed close on Haaken's heels as we slunk down the stairs and slid behind a line of potted frond palms. Never one to resist the grandiose gesture, Sithi trotted nonchalantly to the edge of the wizards' circle and flopped down on her side, head up and pink tongue lolling.

A youngish wizard, his red beard plaited into a hundred tiny braids, snapped his fingers and called, "Rahab."

Sithi went very still. Haaken drew in a sharp breath, his eyes slanting to the real Rahab, still dreaming in her corner.

"Rahab, come to me."

Sithi looked at him, then trotted over and sat at his feet. He dropped the knucklebone he had been chewing and said, "I still maintain, Great Raisneev, that our daemon spirits have more understanding than we know. Rahab, here, responds to commands in the arcane as well as the common tongue."

Raisneev, Sorcerer Ascendant, had watercress caught in his beard. His eyes were raisins, his mouth a prune. He raised his hoary brows and chuckled. "An argument always popular with young wizards, my dear Gibril. With more experience, you'll realize that they are only dumb beasts. Containers for magic, no more than that."

Gibril's fair skin flushed to match his beard. "I can prove it, O Raisneev. Attend this demonstration. Rahab?"

Sithi looked at him with her yellow wolf eyes. Gibal made Signs that left orange trails in the air and said, "Rahab, Stravitiyi podhortis calineris." Witches and wizards don't know each others secret language. Haaken grunted a word in his own language that needed no translation, and I drew my dagger.

Sithi did nothing.

Raisneev chuckled.

Gibal's face got redder and his voice louder.

"Rahab, Stravitiyi podhortis calineris!"

Stretching aft then fore, Sithi stood. She padded to the middle of the circle, turned around a couple of times, then sat, turning her head over her shoulder away from Gibal, looking down and then raising her muzzle to the ceiling. Her wolf mouth stretched into a white-toothed grin.

Raisneev's chuckle exploded into a racheting cackle, joined by the rest of their company in raucous laughter that swept the circle and bounced to the ceiling arches. It went on until Raisneev pounded his cup on his table and wheezed, "While there may be a question as to the understanding of beasts, there can be no question of your beast's opinion, Gibal."

Gibal was too young to laugh at himself. He flung out one stiff index finger and hissed, "Rahab, out of my sight!"

That command, Sithi obeyed.

I sucked in a long breath, and Haaken slumped against the wall. Sithi trotted off into the darkness of Raisneev's palace. I'd seen enough of wizards' feasts and kept my head down while we waited for Sithi to return and prayed that the real Rahab would remain chasing deer in some wolfy dreamhaven.



A cold, wet nose touched the back of my arm.

"Gods' curses, Sithi! Don't do that," I muttered. She reformed with a grin on her lips. "You found it?"

Flicking a glance at the wizards who were falling into boozy indolence and a monumental round of tale spinning, Sithi nodded. "And it's not a job for stealth or cunning. It needs raw strength and brawn."

I looked at Haaken.

"No," Sithi said. "More than Haaken. The Pantalogue tablet is displayed in Raisneev's audience hall, caged in bars of iron rather than veils of magic. I need Haaken, but more do I need the greater part of you, soulkeeper." She was no longer grinning.

A serious Sithi scared me white-eyed. "How much, Sithi?"

"What can you give me and live?"

"Three and a half stone."

"I need more."

"For what?"

"An Urang. Pound for pound, it's four times stronger than even Haaken. I need more weight, soulkeeper. Five stone."

Could I live at less than half my weight? Sithi knew what she asked. If I died, she might as well be dead. I shrugged and managed a grin. "What's your plan?"



The rain had stopped. That was a blessing. I knelt outside an iron-barred window opening into Raisneev's audience chamber, shrinking down to escape the wash of light from a glowing globe as it floated past. The smell of wet grass, the sounds of the night, each detail was magnified by the fear that I held on a tight leash. Sithi's plan held no flash of brilliance, just a reliance on brute force. I had no faith that it was going to work.

Though I was expecting it, Haaken's whisper through the window startled a gasp out of me. "I'm here," I answered.

He reached one hand through the bars and laid it on my cheek. "Have care. I will come for you."

Sithi's face appeared beside Haaken's. "Ready, soulkeeper?"

I grabbed the window bars, fingers clenched, feeling my life flow out of me as Sithi's form bulged into over thirteen stone of ugly orange-haired ape. My hands became sacks of sticks and twigs, my arms and legs no more than joint-knotted bone. My guts felt like they were being drawn out by a hot claw. My lungs screamed for air. My eyes saw the night through a red mist and sounds faded into a hollow buzz in my ears. I felt my heart slow, and slow again.

From inside the window came little creakings of sound, all I could hear of the smashing of wood and the rending of iron bars as Sithi ravaged Raisneev's treasure tabernacle. Little ant voices shouted in alarm and a light appeared in the room. Steel rang on steel, tiny twinkings, as Haaken's axe struck sparks from the heavy tulwar of a palace guard, come only in time to die on Haaken's blade.

With a final monstrous wrench, Sithi ripped open the tabernacle. She grabbed the golden tablet of the Pantalogue, scuttled across the floor on her knuckles, and shoved the tablet through the window into my deadened hands. Loosing a guttural roar, she sprang to Haaken's side as two more guards skidded into the chamber.

Behind them was the Sorcerer Ascendant, hatless, shoeless, food-stained, his face twisted into a mask of black rage. As Raisneev raised his arms, fingers twitching lurid green trails, Haaken ripped the Sphere of Defense talisman from his neck and threw it down. A flash of coruscating white light burned through my dimmed sight, and Sithi and Haaken were enclosed in a shimmering circle that flared as it deflected Raisneev's spear of fire.

That circle muted magic, but did nothing against sharp-edged steel. Haaken was a blur of deadly motion as he set his axe against the swords of Raisneev's guards. Sithi has no skill with weapons. As an Urang, she needed none. Snarling, she ducked under one guard's tulwar, grabbed his arm and ripped it from his shoulder, then threw him across the room. Back to back, they fought as more guards poured into the room.

With little care for his servants, Raisneev threw bolts of verdigreed lightning against the shell of the Sphere. The circle held, and two of Raisneev's guards

were crisped to blackened husks. Putting necessity before pride, Raisneev called for help.

Staggering under the effects of too much wine, the other wizards stumbled to Raisneev's side, took stock of the situation, and joined the Ascendant's attack. Fire splashed and sparked in splatterings of green and red, blue, yellow, orange and violet and purple. Under that onslaught, the Sphere of Defense began to shrink.

I sank to the ground, the tablet clutched to my scrawny chest, bedlam in my ears. I felt hollow, emptied of all thought or desire, except to live. If Sithi died, I couldn't survive long in this state. And if Haaken died, the rest of my soul would go with him, as well as the greater part of my heart.

The sorcerers' fire hissed and crackled through the window, a raging inferno overlaying Sithi's snarls and Haaken's warcry. I dragged myself high enough to see the wizards encircling the Sphere of Defense, closing in as it grew smaller and smaller, crowding Sithi and Haaken closer and closer together.

The lost souls in the Chrestomathy wailed in their animal voices as the turbulence from the sorcerers' magic set the trees to swaying, bouncing the light globes around like mad fireflies, and lashing the waters of the pool. From the stables came the splintering of wood and frantic neighing. The charged air stood my hair on end and crawled over my skin like a million tiny insects. I heard Sithi shriek in pain. The yowl of a hunting cat rode the turgid air.

And I thanked the gods for it.

Fumbling the tablet into my belt pouch, I began to crawl, pulling myself over the slick grass, a feeble scrabbling of emaciated limbs that dragged me slowly across the compound to the cages of the Chrestomathy. The shapeshifters whined and cried, each in its own particular animal voice.

By the cage of a sleek, long-sinewed panther, black as the night around us, I came to the end of my thin rope of strength. He swung from his restless pacing to spring at me, ivory fangs clashing on the bars beside my head, eager claws slashing scarlet ribbons down my shoulder. The pain was only a faraway nagging murmur as I fumbled the Pantalogue out of my pouch.

In the clouded darkness of the night I couldn't see the Word. Again the panther reached for me. As I jerked back, I dropped the tablet. From the palace came the exultant cries of the wizards, answered by Haaken's defiant curses.

I could feel my life leaking away. I picked up the tablet, running my fingers over the raised surface of the Pantalogue Word. Through fingertips made sensitive by desperation, the shape of the letters appeared in my mind. I wriggled up to the bars and looked into the panther's golden eyes. He snarled, white-toothed and spitting, whiskers bristling. As he lunged, I said the Pantalogue Word. With his breath hot on my face, he changed.

Where there had been a panther black as darkness itself, soon crouched a long-limbed, slender man of the same hue. He held one hand before his face, turning his wrist and regarding his palm with his jaw slack in wonder.

"Help me," I whispered.

He raised his head and looked around, then looked at me. "Who are you?"

"A soulkeeper." My voice had gone to a ragged wisp of sound. He leaned closer. "I helped you. Help me now."

He wanted only to run; his body urged him to be gone, trembling with its eagerness to escape. He slid his hands outside the bars and lifted the cage door-latch. When he stepped outside the cage, his chest lifted in a long breath.

"Please, Shapeshifter. I freed you. Help me save my witch from the same fate."

He looked down at me. "How?"

"The palace. The wizards are attacking my friends. Free the other shapeshifters and help us."

"Attack the wizards? And die? Now?"

"You don't have to attack them, just distract them. Get their attention. Give my friends a chance to win free." I poured what was left of my soul into my voice. "That's all I ask."

His deep answer rumbled in my ears. "You ask a lot, soulkeeper."



Not all the shapeshifters answered his call. Some raced for the gates and caused as much pandemonium there as did the many who flung their newly human bodies into the Sorcerer Ascendant's palace, shrieking their hatred and lust for vengeance. With the last of my sight, I saw the wizards' fire in the Pantalogue chamber sputter and die. With the last of my hearing, I heard the shriek of metal being torn from stone anchorings.

I lay curled around emptiness, my mind adrift in a dark silent cloud of fuzzy nothing. After an endless and uncounted time, something lifted me from the earth on which I thought I remembered lying, and might have carried me for a while. It didn't matter, so I didn't think much about it. The dark was comfortable, nothing hurt. Then a spear of yellow fire lanced through my mind. I recoiled, seared by that silent command. I twisted and shuddered away from it, but it pursued me, surrounding me and piercing me with thousands of tiny points of light.



When my eyes opened, Sithi was grinning down at me as I lay within the circle of Haaken's arms. The Pantalogue was clutched firmly to her breast with both hands. "Soulkeeper," she said, "I'm going to make sure you're well fed from now on. If you weighed a half a stone less, we'd both be dead."

"You're welcome, Sithi." Though it felt good to be right where I was, I sat up and looked around at a small cluttered room revealed in the pale glow of a single lamp. It reeked of sour ale and pickled eggs, "Where are we?"

"In the back room of the Skelly's Tail, waiting for Drusa."

As if summoned by her name, the water witch appeared in the doorway amid the clashing of beaded curtains, one long arm firmly around the dark man who had been a panther. His arm lay across her shoulders, as well, claiming Drusa as his. Seeing them together, this whole thing began to make sense to me.

"Well, Shapeshifter," Drusa said, "I shall shout your praises from the rooftops for all to hear. You are a witch of surpassing talent. Irago here agrees."

Sithi stared at them, her hands tightening on the Pantalogue tablet. She seemed a frozen statue, but to one with eyes to see, she went from triumph to anger to dismay to grudging acceptance in the space of a few heartbeats. She tossed her hair back and threw a smile at them. "And your Irago was the reason for all this?"

Drusa rubbed her cheek on his shoulder. "His soulkeeper died. There was no other way."

Sithi laughed and made it sound real. "So it is deathless love that we must blame for having every sorcerer in the city searching for us with ugly and evil intentions. So be it. Pay up, water witch. You owe me all that you have."

Drusa smiled back. She beckoned and two burly, patch-eyed men who grunted under the weight of a large wooden chest crowded into the small back room. At Sithi's nod, Haaken opened the chest.

She had more than we thought.

"I converted everything to coin," Drusa said, "assuming that you would want to be leaving soon."

Sithi's indrawn breath forestalled any answer. I hadn't known there was that much coin in the entire city. The faces of a dozen petty kings stared back at us, their profiles frozen for all time in thousands of gold and copper and silver rounds, glinting and winking in the lamplight.

Also reflecting light was the Ahkim's ruby as it lay in Drusa's open palm. "I return this to you, as well."

Sithi took the ring. Her voice was thin and flat. "The payment seems sufficient."

I began wondering who had bested whom. "One last thing I offer, Shapeshifter." Drusa's dark hands made the true oath sign in the language of witches. "If you will trust me with it, I will return the Pantalogue to Raisneev on condition that he calls off the search for its thieves."

Haaken looked at me. We both looked at Sithi. Her fingers moved over the raised letters of the Word as if to remember that which could not be remembered. She looked at Drusa and Irago. Her body shook in a silent chuckle. Handing the tablet to Drusa, she said, "Fair enough. You have what you want. I have what I want. The wheel is balanced. For now."

Before they left, Irago took both my hands between his and said, What I owe you cannot be repaid."



On top of being made to look fairly foolish, or at best gullible, we still had to leave town. Word came that Raisneev agreed to Drusa's bargain, and the Pantalogue again resides with the Sorcerer Ascendant. That was the public agreement, at least. Unofficially, every wizard in the city is still itching to get his hands on the thieves. They don't much like looking foolish, either.

At least we have enough leather sacks of coin to choke Leviathan, and in the underways, our reputation will precede us. We shouldn't lack for work. Sithi has promised no more drunken carousing. And the moon will fall from the sky and lions become lapcats.

Tonight, we sit around a warm fire spiced with sandalwood, with pedigreed racing camels to carry our fine clothes, a wiry servant girl happy to have been plucked from the stews of the city cooking our food, fine wine in our cups, and the Ahkim's ruby glinting from my thumb as I rest in the circle of Haaken's arms. Again, I love Sithi. She might get me killed, but at least she saves me from the rutabagas.



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Spells of Elemental Air

by Robert S. Mullin

illustrated by Steve Schwartz

IF YOU USE the specialized wizard rules from the *Player's Handbook*, you probably also use *The Complete Wizard's Handbook*. If you use that work, you probably also employ the *Tome of Magic* and its elemental specialists. In that case, you'll likely use the new wizard specialist types introduced in the *PLAYER'S OPTION™: Skills & Powers* and *Spells & Magic* books, if you don't already. That's a lot of wizards, and the compiled spell list for the class as a whole is impressive.

The complete list (as given in *Spells & Magic*) shows that most of the spell schools are well represented, with at least one spell of each spell level. For instance, the number of spells that each elemental school possesses is nearly identical, suggesting that each school enjoys equal footing. That appearance can be deceiving.

Considering the many spells from other sources, such as back issues of *DRAGON® Magazine*, various AD&D® accessories, and even spells of your own devising, the elemental spells are hardly equal. *The Wizard's Spell Compendium* series, once complete, should show that Elemental Fire possesses by far the most spells, followed by Elemental Earth, then Elemental Water, and finally Elemental Air.

The following spells bolster the number of Elemental Air spells currently in print. It doesn't level the playing field, of course, but it should draw some much deserved attention to this ignored and often forgotten branch of the elemental disciplines.

Cloud Cushion

(Evocation)

Level: 1

Range: 10'/level

Components: V, S, M

Duration: 1 round/level

Casting Time: 1

Area of Effect: 10' x 10' x 5'

Saving Throw: Special

This spell creates a 5' thick, 10' square mass of billowing, semi-solid fog that serves as a cushion for falling creatures. The caster may place the *cloud cushion* anywhere within the spell's range, but it must rest on a solid surface. Once placed, the *cloud cushion* cannot be moved. The *cloud cushion* negates the damage inflicted by falls of up to 10 feet per level of the caster. Falls of greater distance cause damage to the victim for only the additional distance fallen. For example, a *cloud cushion* created by a 10th-level wizard negates all damage from a fall of 100 feet or less. However, a victim falling 120 feet before landing on the *cloud cushion* suffers falling damage for only the additional 20 feet (2d6 hp damage in this case). Note that the actual distance fallen counts against the 200 feet/20d6 maximum falling damage rule. Therefore, if a victim falls 300 feet before hitting a 10th-level wizard's *cloud cushion*, the victim still suffers only 10d6 hp damage, as any distance greater than 200 feet does not increase falling damage beyond 20d6. However, individuals who fall from heights of 300 feet or greater must save vs. death magic (with a -1 penalty

for every 100 feet above that) or miss the *cloud cushion* altogether and suffer falling damage as usual.

Cloud cushion can be negated with a successful *dispel magic* or similar effect, or by the caster's silent act of will. Otherwise, it remains in place until its duration expires.

The material components for this spell are a fist-sized ball of cotton and a handful of fine sand, both of which are consumed in the casting.

Glide

(Alteration)

Level: 2

Range: Touch

Components: V, S, M

Duration: Special

Casting Time: 2

Area of Effect: 1 creature

Saving Throw: None

This spell combines certain aspects of the wizard spells *feather fall* and *fly*. Like *feather fall*, this spell allows the caster (or another recipient touched by the caster) to descend from high altitudes at a decreased rate of speed (two feet per second, 120 feet per round), though the spell does not reduce the recipient's mass. Like *fly*, however, *glide* enables the recipient to perform directional changes (maneuverability class A) during the descent, thus providing limited horizontal movement. The recipient can travel a linear distance equal to twice the height from which he began to glide. For example, a recipient gliding from a 100' cliff descends at an angle that places him 200 feet away from his starting point upon landing. On the other hand, the recipient could descend 100 feet in one direction, make a 180-degree turn, and descend the remaining 100 feet so as to land at the base of his launching point. Note, however, that the recipient must glide the full distance. If the recipient wants to land at the base of his launching point but has no desire to expose himself via the glide out, turn, and glide back routine, he can opt to perform a spiralling "dive" in order to maintain a constant close proximity to his launching point. Under no circumstances does the *glide* spell enable the recipient to gain altitude, nor can the recipient increase or decrease the rate of descent, though certain magical and mundane effects (e.g., powerful winds, a *windshear* spell, etc.) can be factored in, as appropriate to the effect in question. In any case, the spell lasts until the

recipient lands, though he must begin gliding within one round of the spell's casting or the magic is wasted. *Dispel magic* does not end the spell prematurely, but if the glider enters an *antimagic shell* or dead magic zone, or if a *wish* or *limited wish* is used to negate the spell, the recipient immediately plummets to the ground and suffers falling damage as usual.

The material component for this spell is a miniature kite, which is consumed in the casting.

Part Vapors

(Alteration)

Level: 3

Range: 0

Components: V, S, M

Duration: 1 round/level

Casting Time: 3

Area of Effect: Special

Saving Throw: None

By means of this spell, the caster brings into being a narrow path that forces away smoke, fog, mist, and similar vapors, much like a *part water* spell divides fluids. The spell creates a stationary path that is 10 feet wide by 10 feet tall and extends away from the caster in the direction he is facing when the spell is cast, to a distance of 10 yards per level. While the duration lasts, nonmagical vapors cannot enter the path, thus eliminating any visibility impairments within the area of effect.

Part vapor sunders vapor-producing spells and spell-like effects of third-level (or the equivalent thereof) and below. When opposing more powerful vapors (e.g., *cloudkill*, *death fog*, green dragon breath, etc.), creatures within the area of effect receive a +2 bonus to any applicable saving throws, or -1 hp per damage die if no save is allowed.

Part vapor also can be used as an attack form against vaporous creatures (e.g., smoke para-elementals, vampiric mist, beings in *gaseous form* etc.). Any such creature that enters the area of effect, or is within the area of effect when it forms, suffers 2 hp damage per level of the caster, plus a like amount for every round it remains in the area of effect thereafter.

A successful *dispel magic* or similar power causes the path to collapse prematurely, as does a silent command from the caster.

The material component for this spell is a stoppered glass tube of any length containing clean, clear air.



Windshear

(Alteration)

Level: 4

Range: 50 yards +10 yards/level

Components: V, S, M

Duration: 1 round/level

Casting Time: 3

Area of Effect: 25'-radius sphere

Saving Throw: Special

This spell enables the caster to cause a sudden, violent disruption in air currents within the area of effect, which the caster may move about within the spell's range at a movement rate equal to three times his experience level. Thus, a 7th-level wizard can move the *windshear* at a rate of 21.

Flying creatures who pass into, out of, or through the area of effect must immediately save vs. breath weapon or lose control and crash, suffering falling damage (1d6 hp damage per 10 feet fallen) as usual. If more than 100 feet separates the flying creature and the ground (or other surface, as applicable), a second saving throw is permitted to regain control, but no

other actions may be taken that round, and the creature automatically acts last on the following round.

Missile weapons that pass into, out of, or through the area of effect suffer a -4 penalty to hit but are otherwise unaffected. Missile spells and magical effects that require an actual attack roll (e.g., *Melf's acid arrow*, etc.) suffer this penalty, but not effects that are assumed always to hit (e.g., *magic missile*, *fireball*, etc.).

Spells and effects that travel along air currents (e.g., *gaseous form*, *stinking cloud*, *cloudkill*, etc.) suffer a random course change upon entering or exiting the *windshear*. If such effects are under the directional control of a caster, magical item, or the like, control is regained at the end of the following round (though the course alteration may require the effect once again to break the *windshear's* plane in order to resume its previous heading). If the effect is not a controlled force, it continues on its new course as air currents demand.



When brought into contact with magical wind-based effects (e.g., *gust of wind*, *whirlwind*, etc.), there is a 50% chance that the *windshear* negates the other effect. Conversely, there is also a 50% chance that the *windshear* is negated and absorbed into the new effect, increasing the effect's duration by whatever remained of the *windshear's* duration before it was absorbed. Against normal winds, the *windshear* has an equal chance of either increasing or decreasing the wind speed as it passes into the spell's area of effect.

Finally, when creatures from the Elemental Plane of Air—particularly those creatures composed of wind and air (e.g., air elementals, invisible stalkers, aerial servants, etc.)—pass into, out of, or through a *windshear's* area of effect, the sudden disruption to their own personal air currents is sufficient to slow them down for a few moments while they “reorganize” these patterns. Essentially, they suffer a +4 penalty to the next applicable initiative roll following contact with the *windshear*.

Note that this spell is not the same as a *gust of wind*. Although capable of altering the course of flying creatures, missile weapons, and certain spells, it does not produce any force of its own. It is simply a disruption in air currents that such creatures and conditions utilize for motive force. Therefore, it cannot be used to extinguish flames, move stationary objects or levitating creatures, or the like.

The material component for this spell is a knife constructed entirely of glass and worth no less than 100 gp, which the caster sweeps before him in a cutting motion during the spell's casting. The glass knife is not consumed and may be reused.

Mass Flight

(Alteration)
Level: 5
Range: Touch
Components: V, S, M
Duration: 1 turn/level + 1d6 turns
Casting Time: 5
Area of Effect: 1 creature/3 levels
Saving Throw: None

An improved version of the third-level *fly* spell, *mass flight* enables the caster to bestow the ability to fly upon multiple subjects. In addition to himself, the caster may affect up to one creature per three experience levels. Thus, a 12th-level caster may affect four creatures in addition to himself, five creatures at 15th level, six creatures at 18th level, and so forth. Otherwise, this spell operates as a standard *fly* spell.

The material component for *mass flight* is one wing feather from any bird for each recipient of the spell.

Airmantle

(Abjuration, Conjunction/Summoning)
Level: 6
Range: 0
Components: V, S, M
Duration: 1 turn + 1 round/level
Casting Time: 6
Area of Effect: Special
Saving Throw: None

When this spell is cast, the wizard is surrounded by an invisible layer of clean air that moves with him. While it lasts, the *airmantle* confers several benefits upon the caster, as follows:

- ◆ The caster is rendered immune to the effects (both harmful and helpful) of nonmagical gases and gaseous effects (e.g., poison gas traps, smoke, methane, etc.), as the *airmantle's* magic continuously replenishes its oxygen content, effectively filtering out such fumes.

- ◆ When subjected to gaseous effects of a fantastic nature (e.g., spells and spell-like effects, breath weapons, etc.), an *airmantle* reduces damage inflicted upon the caster by one-half due to the *airmantle's* filtering capabilities. If the caster also makes his saving throw against the effect, the damage is reduced to one-quarter. If the gaseous effect produces a result that is not expressed by hit-point damage (e.g., death, petrification, paralyzation, etc.), the caster receives a +4 bonus to the saving throw instead. If the gaseous effect does both, then the *airmantle's* protection applies to both.

- ◆ The *airmantle* provides the caster with breathable air in an otherwise hostile atmosphere, such as underwater or the vacuum of space. (Note that, in the SPELLJAMMER® universe, the *airmantle* cannot be fouled due to its filtering and replenishing effects.)

Dispel magic has no effect on an *airmantle*, but a *limited wish* or more

powerful spell negates it prematurely, as does the caster's silent command.

The material components for this spell are a lump of charcoal, a small air bladder, and a six-inch length of metal tubing, all of which are consumed during the spell's casting.

Wind Conduit

(Evocation)

Level: 7

Range: 0

Components: V, S

Duration: 1 round/level

Casting Time: 1 round

Area of Effect: Special

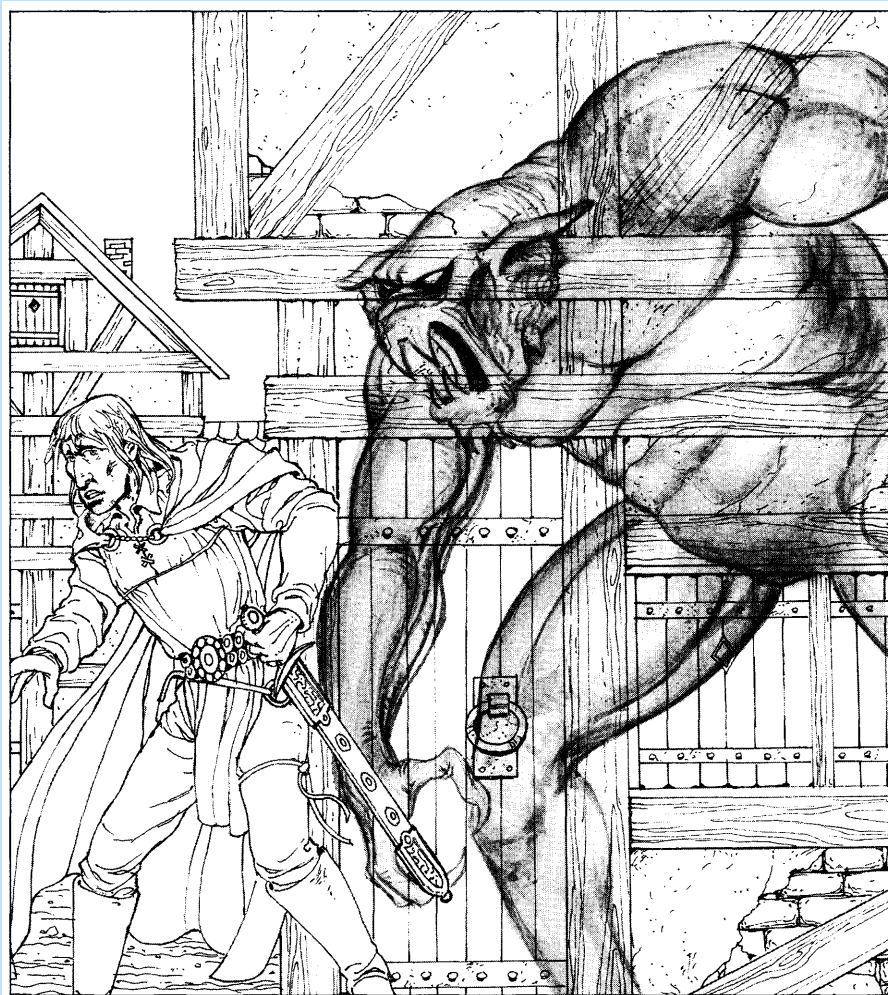
Saving Throw: Special

When this spell is cast, a temporary conduit is opened that creates a direct link between the caster and the Elemental Plane of Air. The *wind conduit* can be used by the caster in one of two ways, determined at the time of casting; once chosen, the method cannot be changed.

The first version of the spell enables the caster to manipulate the energy derived from the *wind conduit* to boost the effectiveness of his air-based spells. Essentially, the caster's air-based spells perform at maximum potential while the *wind conduit* remains in effect. Each time a spell is cast, however, the caster must make a save vs. spell (adjustments for magical protections and the like apply, and Elemental Air wizard specialists receive their usual +2 saving throw bonus). If the save fails, the *wind conduit* benefits the spell as intended but closes immediately thereafter, ending the spell.

The second version of the spell enables the caster to use the *wind conduit's* energy to power spells without losing them from his mind. When used in this fashion, however, the caster must make an unmodified saving throw vs. spells (Air Elementalists still receive their +2 save bonus) each time a spell is cast. If the save fails, the caster suffers a magical backlash that wipes clean all air-based spells from his mind (including the spell that caused the backlash), and the *wind conduit* ends. Lost spells can be memorized normally, of course.

In either case, there is a 10% non-cumulative chance each round that the *wind conduit* closes on its own, causing no harm to the caster. Otherwise, the *wind conduit* remains in effect for the full duration unless the above conditions are met, the caster dies, is



rendered unconscious, or wills the spell to end, or it is negated with a *limited wish* or *wish*; *dispel magic* has no effect on a *wind conduit*. In addition, a *wind conduit* does not open within an *antimagic shell*, dead magic zone, or similar area. If the caster has an active *wind conduit* and moves into such an area, it closes until the caster exits.

(Note: As might be expected, wizards have devised versions of this spell suited for the three other elemental disciplines. These spells—called *earth conduit*, *flame conduit*, and *water conduit*, respectively—are identical to *wind conduit* in all ways, save that each is attuned to its own elemental plane.)

Death Stalker

(Conjuration/Summoning)

Level: 8

Range: 10 yards

Components: V, S, M

Duration: Special

Casting Time: 5 rounds

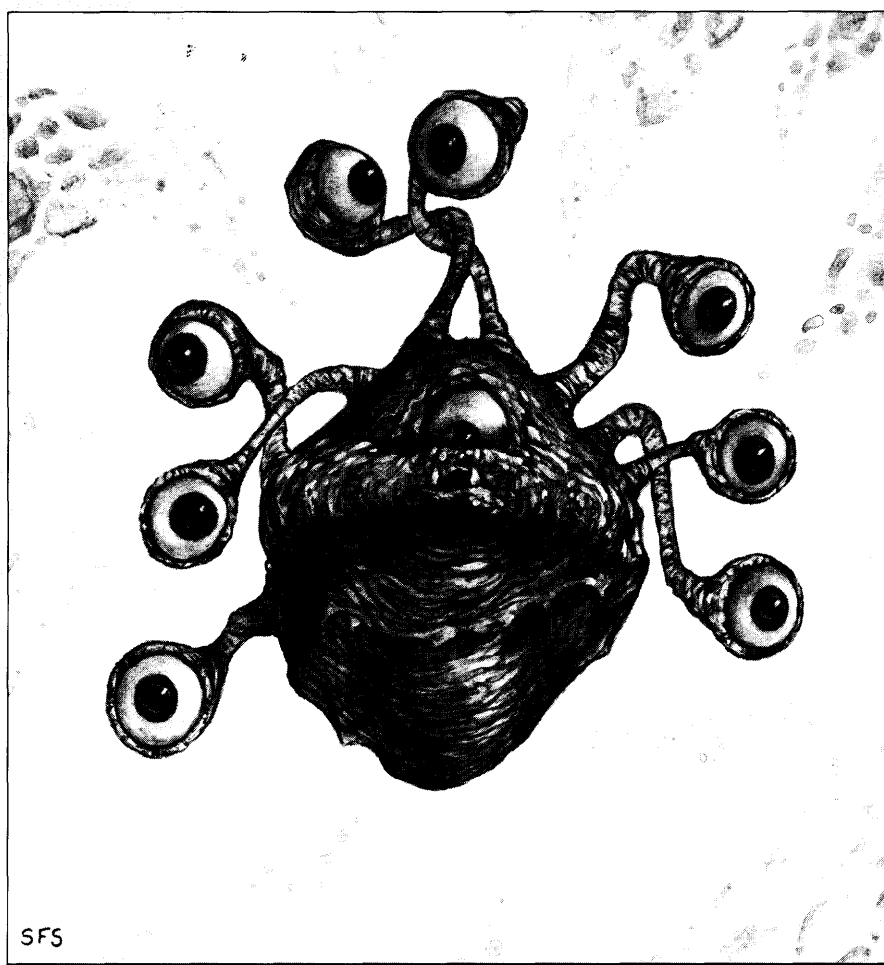
Area of Effect: Special

Saving Throw: None

This spell is a highly specialized version of the sixth-level wizard spell *invisible stalker*. The two spells are identical, with differences as follows:

- ❖ The death stalker is a special 12-HD variety of invisible stalker that possesses maximum hit points (96).

- ❖ The only task a death stalker may undertake is one that calls for it to track down and slay a specific individual determined by the caster at the time of casting. If the death stalker succeeds in its mission, it is freed from service and immediately returns to its home plane. If the death stalker is defeated, it reforms exactly 12 hours later at the location where it was "slain" and resumes its mission. The death stalker can reform in this manner one time for every three experience levels the caster possesses. Thus, a death stalker summoned by an 18th-level wizard reforms up to six times if it fails to complete its task. If it is slain after reforming the final time, the spell ends. Note, however, that this spell poses a slight risk to the caster. Each time the death stalker reforms, there is a 2%



cumulative chance that it breaks free of its bond and immediately returns to slay the caster, using whatever remains of its reforming ability to do so (though this still occurs at 12-hour intervals).

In addition to the material components of burning incense and a piece of horn carved into a crescent shape, this spell also requires three drops of the caster's blood and an object (e.g., a coin, scrap of cloth, etc.) belonging to the individual the death stalker must slay. The object is consumed.

Solidify Air

(Alteration)

Level: 9

Range: 10 yards/level

Components: V, S, M

Duration: 1 round/3 levels

Casting Time: 1 round

Area of Effect: 10' cube

Saving Throw: Special

This spell enables the caster to cause the air within the stationary area of effect to become as solid and unyielding as stone. A creature caught in the area of effect must make a saving throw vs. spell. If the save succeeds, the creature manages to exit

the area of effect before the air solidifies (the spell still takes effect, in any case). If the save fails, however, the victim must make a second saving throw, this time against death magic. If this save fails, the victim is completely encased in solid air and cannot move, talk, or even breathe (suffocation rules apply) for the duration of the spell. On the other hand, if the death magic save is successful, the victim has managed to free enough of his body to breathe and talk, and, at the DM's discretion, perform other actions that do not require complete mobility. Note, however, that when used against creatures of great size, the spell has limited effectiveness. If cast on a dragon, for example, the spell would trap a single appendage at best. The area of effect is stationary (even if cast straight up; the solid air is not affected by gravity), so the dragon wouldn't be able to move with any great ability; but unless the spell was centered on its head, the dragon would be free to use its breath weapon, cast spells, and make bite attacks. Also note that, when used against creatures that are composed of air (e.g., invisible stalkers, air

elementals, etc.), such creatures are merely *slowed* while they remain in the spell's area of effect. If they make a successful saving throw, they are *slowed* for only one round; otherwise, they remain in the area of effect for 1d4+1 rounds.

In any case, creatures and objects completely trapped within a *solidify air* spell are impervious to physical damage, whether by weapon blow, spell, magical item discharge, or the like. Partially-trapped creatures and objects sustain half damage from attacks. In both cases, mental attacks (e.g., psionics, *charm* spells, etc.) are uninhibited by the spell.

Solidify air has other uses as well. If placed between the caster and an on-rushing opponent (or opponents), missile weapons, certain spells and magical effects, the spell creates an almost foolproof barrier, especially when used in narrow corridors and passages. Similarly, it can be used to "fill" pits, prevent doors from opening, and the like. DMs might also rule that missile weapons and missile-like spells (e.g., *magic missile*, *Melf's acid arrow*, etc.), magical and mundane effects that flow on air currents (e.g., *cloudkill*, *stinking cloud*, gaseous breath weapons and traps, etc.), and so forth can be suspended within a *solidify air* if the timing is precise (i.e., the *solidify air* takes effect at the same time the condition in question enters its area). It should be noted that, when the spell expires, a trapped missile weapon would fall to the ground, as its motive force would be negated. Other effects are governed by their own durations, as appropriate.

Solidify air can be ended prematurely by the casters silent act of will, a successful *dispel magic* or similar effect, or upon the casters demise. Otherwise, the spell lasts for its full duration.

The material component for this spell is 1,000 gp diamond cut so as to form a one-inch cube. The diamond cube is consumed in the casting.

(Note: *Solidify air* is but one of several spells used in the manufacture of a *ring of might*, as featured in *DRAGON Magazine* #223.)



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Miracles of Flight

by James Wyatt and Steve Berman

illustrated by Jim Crabtree

THE MIRACLE OF FLIGHT has always held humanity spellbound. The effortless soaring of birds through the sky is astonishing, and the way bees remain aloft defies our understanding of aerodynamics. Even the silent flapping of bats has served for centuries as a reminder of human limitation. From Daedalus and Icarus with their handmade wings to the famous flight of the Wright brothers, humanity has turned to science to overcome the constraints of gravity.

In an AD&D® campaign, many more races possess the ability to fly. From rock-like gargoyles to elegant winged elves, huge dragons to tiny

pixies, a host of fantasy races inhabit the air. Still, the more common races, the human and demihuman races that found empires and civilizations, are fundamentally landbound.

And then there's magic.

A wizard's *fly* spell, a *broom*, *carpet*, or *wings of flying*, or *winged boots* can bestow flight on ordinary human beings . . . or dwarves, halflings, or orcs. Human nature is to tinker and invent—gnomish nature even more so. Thus, here follow the fruits of that inventive labor: a collection of items both magical and mechanical, each designed to re-create the miracle of flight.

Anklet of Feathers

The clasp of this fine silver chain is fashioned in the shape of a feather. When fastened about the ankle, this item allows the wearer to shapechange, up to three times per day, into the form of any normal bird (a songbird, hawk, or vulture would qualify; a roc or giant owl is not "normal"). All of the character's possessions are transformed into part of the bird's body, but the anklet remains visible as a silver band of an appropriate size for the bird-form's leg. In all other ways, the ability bestowed by the anklet is identical to a druid's shapechange ability.

XP Value: 1,500 **GP Value:** 8,000

Clasps of Theol

Theol of Dimenthos was an inventive and cautious priest. He preached the virtues of being prepared for emergencies nearly as often as he promoted the tenets of his faith. Theol prayed and fasted to imbue a gift from a goldsmith, a set of cloak clasps on a chain, with power. His efforts were rewarded, and he made good use of the clasps until he retired from adventuring at a ripe old age and passed the clasps on to an acolyte who soon disappeared while traversing a marsh. Since then, the clasps have been sighted in the possession of others, but the priesthood has not yet successfully recovered them.

The clasps do not function if worn with a cloak. They appear merely ornamental, not even registering as magical to divination. (That is why they are often overlooked as valuable treasure.) When the clasps are thrown into the air, the enchantment is invoked. Certain materials begin to tear loose and fly about the clasps until they are magically woven into a



special garment. Outside, the clasps attract leaves from trees (leaving the nearest branches bare) and loose feathers. Inside, sheets of parchment and paper and dust are drawn forth. (The summons is strong enough to pull a scroll from a person's hands.) If in an area where no suitable materials are found, such as in a desert or glacier, the clasps will not work. In a single round a cloak is fashioned, drifting down to fall about the clasp's owner's shoulders.

This cloak seems either scaled or feathered with the drawn materials. As long as the wearer is not wearing metal armor, the cloak grants an additional +2 protection to Armor Class. The real power in the cloak is that it may be transformed into a set of feathered wings, allowing the wearer to fly at a movement rate of 18 with a maneuverability class of B.

The created cloak lasts for only six hours, after which time it falls apart. The clasps may not be used again for a full day.

XP Value: 1,200 **GP Value:** 6,000

Cloak of the Swanmay

This magical cloak appears as a shawl made from white swan feathers. It can be used only by females of good alignment; any other character donning the cloak immediately suffers 2d8 hp damage. A good-aligned female wearing the *cloak of the swanmay* can, at will, cause the cloak to transform into a pair of huge, swan-like wings, with a span of about 10 feet. The wings allow the wearer to fly at a rate of 18 (C), but the flight is very tiring. After each turn of flying, the wearer must make a Constitution check, with failure forcing her to rest for one turn for every turn spent flying.

Note that possession of a *cloak of the swanmay* does not transform a character into a swanmay. True swanmays, and other benevolent protectors of nature, are likely to respond well to a character wearing a *cloak of the swanmay*, however, if only because the cloak is a sure sign that the character is good.

XP Value: 1,000 **GP Value:** 6,000



Cloud Blend

A rare concoction found in large potion bottles, *cloud blend* is said to have been created by cloud giant alchemists as part of their efforts to maintain a floating estate. A flask of *cloud blend* is always stoppered, and one rarely (10%) contains more than a single dose.

If ingested, *cloud blend* tastes heavy and sweet. No harm is caused, except that the drinker feels bloated and is unable to eat or drink again for a full day.

Cloud blend is meant to be spilled out on a surface, where the milky-looking liquid quickly changes into thick wisps. In a single round, the contents of the bottle form a 20'-radius white cloud. The vapors appear to be a foot deep. The clouds are magical, as anyone may climb them as if they were solid. After 2-5 rounds of the cloud's formation, they begin to rise straight up at a rate of 10 feet/round.

A dose of *cloud blend* lasts for 1d6 turns. In the last turn of its duration, the cloud begins to break apart. A strong wind cannot destroy the cloud but rather gives it horizontal momentum, pushing it along with the gusts. There is no other means of steering the created cloud.

XP Value: 300 **GP Value:** 1,500

Cloud Chariot

This magical device is formed out of solid cloud—it looks like a normal war chariot formed from ice and surrounded with a nimbus of water vapor that shimmers in the sunlight. It levitates a few inches off the ground when at rest. When a flying mount (such as a pegasus, griffon, or hippogriff) is hitched to it, the animal can pull the chariot and its riders through the air without suffering any effects of encumbrance. The chariot can carry 600 lbs. of weight.

In addition to carrying a rider, the cloud chariot bestows some magical protection. Any riders in the chariot, as well as the mount pulling it, gain a +2 bonus to all saving throws against



air-based magic, including elemental spells and the attacks of air elementals and djinn.

Cloud chariots are manufactured primarily on the Elemental Plane of Air and are most commonly found there and throughout the Outer Planes.

XP Value: 1,250 **GP Value:** 8,000

Courier Shaft

These enchanted arrows are prized by rangers and scouts. Each appears as a normal arrow, though anyone with the bowyer/fletcher proficiency notes that the hawk feathers at the end of its shaft are longer than they should be. The arrow tip is oddly rounded. Wrapped tightly around the wooden shaft is a thin piece of parchment. The arrow appears nothing more than the sort to bear a message.

When a *courier shaft* is fired from a bow, it immediately transforms itself into an actual hawk with the parchment tied to its talons. The bird flies straight in the direction of the message's intended target which can be no more than a 100 miles distant. The hawk will enter through windows or other openings to reach the target. Once before the individual, the hawk vanishes in a puff of feathers, and the parchment with the message floats down.

A *courier shaft* cannot be used in combat. If fired with no message written on the parchment, it simply falls to the ground inches away from the bow.

XP Value: 25 **GP Value:** 250

Crown of the Wind Dukes

According to legend, the race known as vaati (or wind dukes) once ruled over a vast empire spanning a multitude of worlds and planes. In order to rule this empire, they appointed nobles of various other races as governors and created enchanted crowns as symbols of office for these governors. These *crowns of the wind dukes* are now scattered through the planes.

A *crown of the wind dukes* can be worn only by a person of noble blood (which would include any blooded character in the BIRTHRIGHT® campaign). Any other character placing the crown upon his head instantly suffers 3d6 hp damage, and the crown topples off. The crown bestows the following spell-like abilities: *dust devil* at will, *feather fall* at will, and *gust of wind* three times per day. In addition, the wearer can fly at a speed of 12 (B). The crown can be knocked off with a physical blow, but no amount of wind or other force causes it to fall off its wearers head.

The *crowns of the wind dukes* are very strongly aligned with law. Non-lawful characters must make a saving throw vs. paralyzation every month if the crown is worn constantly, with failure indicating an involuntarily alignment shift towards law. Lawful characters who wear the crowns become more rigid and unbending in their dedication to law.

XP Value: 3,000 **GP Value:** 25,000



Daedalus' Wings

Designed to simulate the wings of birds, these magical wings are manufactured from feathers on a wicker frame, held together by wax. Similar in many respects to *wings of flying*, Daedalus' wings strap onto the arms, where they work their enchantment in the wearers muscles and bone structure, actually becoming part of his body. They allow flight at a speed of 48, maneuverability class B, and

can be used for any length of time. Naturally, the wearer's hands are otherwise useless while in flight. The wearer can remove the wings at will.

They do have one significant drawback, however: they are very susceptible to heat or fire. They make saving throws as paper against normal or magical fire, with failure indicating either the combustion of the feathers or the wax melting. In either case, the wings are rendered useless, and the wearer may be in for quite a fall.

XP Value: 750 **GP Value:** 2,500

Darkest Bridle

A band of mercenaries coerced a mage to enchant several bridles of black leather with onyx studs for use in their campaign against the elves. They wanted steeds that would not only be swifter than any normal animal but also ones that could strike fear in an enemy's heart.

When held in hand and cracked against the possessor's leg, a *darkest bridle* magically summons one of the following creatures:

| Roll | Creature |
|------|--------------|
| 1-3 | Giant raven |
| 4-5 | Mobat |
| 6 | Nightmare |
| 7-8 | Wyvern |
| 9-12 | Black dragon |

Summoned creatures arrive in 1d6 turns, and the summoner has no idea which creature has been summoned until it arrives. A specialist mage from the school of Conjuraction/Summoning, however, may choose which creature appears.

The steed allows itself to be bound by the bridle and serves as a mount



for not more than four hours. At the end of that time, the beast rudely throws its rider (even if from a great height) and returns whence it came. If the rider assaults the summoned creature at any time, the beast defends itself fiercely; otherwise, the summoned creature does not attack the summoner. Should the summoner and summoned creature ever meet again, however, the mount might remember its servitude and wish for revenge.

Should the bridle be used more than once a day, the creature called forth attacks the summoner and any other individuals nearby. The bridle can be used only by non-good aligned individuals.

XP Value: 500 **GP Value:** 2,500

Flying Windmill

Manufactured by the infamous tinker gnomes of Krynn (the world of the DRAGONLANCE® saga), the "flying windmill" is a massive contraption. It does, in fact, resemble a windmill uprooted from the ground and set to flying, though it is covered with wings and rudders intended to aid in navigation. It stands 30 feet tall, and its square base measures 10 feet on a side. It has a door at the bottom and numerous windows through which gnomes and other small object can occasionally be seen to fall.

The flying windmill, incredibly enough, is capable of flight. It plods through the air at a speed of 6 (E). It can hold up to 75 gnomes, or 25 human-sized creatures. It offers 90% cover to archers firing from its windows. If the PLAYER'S OPTION™ rules for siege warfare (Chapter 8 in *Combat & Tactics*) are in use, the brick walls of the windmill can withstand 25 points

of structural damage before being destroyed. Gnomes have been known to jump from windows or the door, attempting to land on the backs of flying opponents, but few other races would dare try such a maneuver.

The flying windmill is incredibly difficult to pilot. Only one character at a time (gnome or otherwise) can operate the machine's controls, and that character must make a successful Intelligence check to make the machine cooperate. Each action in combat-changing direction or altitude, speeding up or slowing down—requires a successful check. Failure usually indicates that the flying windmill does the exact opposite of what was intended, though the DM is free to concoct other mishaps, particularly for very bad rolls.

XP Value: 9,000 **GP Value:** 45,000



Gargyle Armor

This suit of plate mail is made of dark gray iron, making it seem heavy and bulky. A full helm, its visor shaped to resemble a twisted, grotesque face, accompanies the armor. Its most notable feature, however, is the pair of metal wings protruding from the back of the suit. In addition to functioning as *plate mail* +1, the armor bestows the ability to fly at a rate of 12 (C). The gauntlets of this armor bear heavy claws that inflict 1-4 hp damage on a successful hit. The claws are not considered magical weapons.

XP Value: 4,000 **GP Value:** 24,000

Greater Apparatus of Kwalish

The archmage Kwalish was immortalized because of his invention of the apparatus that bears his name, a rare and unusual magical item. Unknown

to most people, however, Kwalish devised another apparatus later in his life, a creation that he considered a far superior accomplishment. Because of the dangers inherent in its use, however, the *greater apparatus* is much less common than its aquatic counterpart.

The greater apparatus appears similar to the common device when found: an iron barrel big enough to hold two men. While operating, it looks like a small dragon. A secret catch opens the hatch on one end, to reveal 11 levers:

| Lever | Effect when Pulled |
|-------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Extend/retract legs and tail (must be extended to land or steer) |
| 2 | Uncover/cover forward porthole |
| 3 | Uncover/cover side portholes |
| 4 | Extend/retract head and neck |
| 5 | Snap jaws (causes 3d6 hp damage to apparatus if head is not extended) |
| 6 | Extend/retract wings (must be extended to fly) |
| 7 | Move forward/slow down |
| 8 | Steer left/right |
| 9 | Ascend/descend |
| 10 | Open/close hatch |
| 11 | Fire/reload "breath weapon" |

The apparatus walks on its legs at a movement rate of 6, while it can fly at the lumbering rate of 9 (E). The dragon-like head snaps its jaws, hitting any Armor Class on a roll of 16 or better. (Subtract the target's defensive adjustment for Dexterity, but no other AC adjustments apply.) The bite inflicts 3d6 hp damage on a hit. The apparatus is AC 2, and 100 hp damage will destroy a side. Each wing can only sustain 50 hp before being destroyed, and both wings are required for the apparatus to remain airborne.

The apparatus' breath weapon is its most powerful ability—and the most dangerous, potentially, to the apparatus' user. Pulling on the eleventh control level actually fires a small cannonball from the dragon's mouth, which acts as an arquebus in all respects (Type P, Speed 15, ROF 1/3, Range 50/150/210, Damage 1d10). The weapon has a THAC0 of 10, regardless of the skill of the operator. Like an arquebus, the apparatus'

weapon backfires on an attack roll of 1 or 2, causing 1d6 points of damage to anyone inside the apparatus. If the jaws of the dragon head are not open when the weapon is fired, the weapon backfires automatically. Also like an arquebus, this "breath weapon" inflicts cumulative damage if the damage die roll is a 10. Roll the die again, adding the result to 10, and continue as long as the roll is 10. The weapon requires a supply of ammunition and smoke powder, though it reloads automatically when the firing level is pushed back to its original position. The reloading mechanism holds 10 shots at a time.

XP Value: 10,000 **GP Value:** 50,000

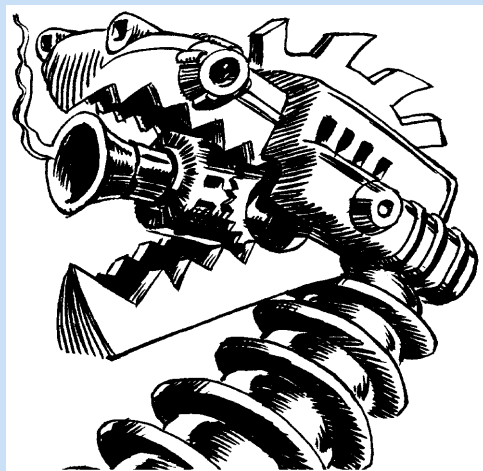
Horseshoes of the Asperii

Similar to *horseshoes of a zephyr*, these enchanted horseshoes allow a horse to run without touching the ground. In the case of *horseshoes of the asperii*, however, the horse gains the actual ability to fly, moving at great speed and maneuverability. The horse's maximum speed and maneuverability class depends on how much weight it carries, as shown on the table below.

| Load Carried | Max. Speed | Man. Class |
|---------------|---------------|------------|
| 0-200 lbs. | 48 | C |
| 201-400 lbs. | 36 | D |
| 401-600 lbs. | 24 | E |
| Over 600 lbs. | unable to fly | |

Horseshoes of the asperii are native to the FORGOTTEN REALMS® setting and are found only rarely on other worlds.

XP Value: 3,000 **GP Value:** 8,500



Mask of the Aarakocra

This is a psionic magical item native to the DARK SUN® campaign setting and rarely found elsewhere. It is a mask made of leather, designed to cover the upper half of the face. Eagle feathers decorate the mask, and the beak of an eagle is set to cover the wearer's nose.

The *mask of the aarakocra* has two powers that mimic psionic sciences:

animal affinity (giant eagle) and clairvoyance.

Three times per day, the wearer can use animal affinity to adopt one of the attributes of a giant eagle: Armor Class 7, a flying movement rate of 48 (D), claw and beak attacks (THAC0 15; #AT 3; Dmg 1-6/1-6/2-12), or Hit Dice of 4.

The wearer must choose one attribute to adopt at a time, and the wearer changes physically (growing wings or claws, for example) to match the attribute. Also three times per day, the wearer can use *clairvoyance* to see distant objects, as the third-level wizard spell.

The *mask of the aarakocra* has an Intelligence of 13, allowing it to communicate its feelings via empathy with its wearer. These masks are of varying alignment and have ego ratings of 6, which may bring them into conflict with their wearers (as described for magical swords in Appendix 3 of the DUNGEON MASTER® Guide).

XP Value: 1,000 **GP Value:** 5,000

Ravenkin

This magical ring is most often found in the RAVENLOFT® setting, though some have been found in the GREYHAWK® campaign as well. It is a shiny

silver band set with a large onyx. A sun emblem is carved into the black stone.



The *ring of the ravenkin* bestows a limited shapechanging ability on its wearer. Once per day, a character wearing the ring can assume an avian form similar to the hybrid form of a wereraven (described in the RAVENLOFT MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM®, Volume One): the arms grow long and transform into wings, the head becomes that of a raven, and the body is covered with black feathers. In this form,

the character can fly at a rate of 24 (C) and attack with the raven beak, inflicting 2d6 hp damage with a successful attack.

In addition to this transformation, the wearer of a *ring of the ravenkin* can communicate in the

languages of ravens, ravenkin, and wereravens. A cleric or pal-

adin wearing a *ring of the ravenkin* gains a +2 bonus when attempting to turn vampires, and a +1 bonus when turning other undead.

It is important to note that, in the RAVENLOFT setting, many of these rings have become cursed over the years. Some may actually inflict lycanthropy on the wearer, turning the unfortunate character into an infected wereraven. The DM is encouraged to consult the RAVENLOFT accessory *Forged of Darkness* for other curse ideas.

XP Value: 1,750 **GP Value:** 6,500

Rudder of the Winds

This enchanted item is a rudder used to steer an oceangoing vessel. They are constructed for different kinds of ships, from Viking longships to Renaissance galleons, and a rudder constructed for one kind of vessel will not function if installed in another.

When the pilot of the vessel speaks a command word with his hand on the tiller or helm, the ship

begins slowly to rise into the air. The vessel "floats" on the air and moves exactly as it does on water, with the same speed and maneuverability. Oared vessels push



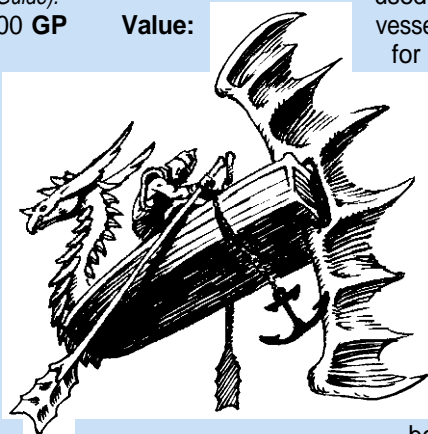
against the air as if it were water, while sailed ships rely on winds as usual. The pilot can change the ship's altitude by concentrating, but the ship must maintain forward movement in order to ascend or descend. The ship can move up or down 1 foot for every yard of forward movement.

XP Value: 7,500 **GP Value:** 30,000

Saddle of the Dragon Steed

This enormously powerful magical item is a huge, ornate saddle made of leather and steel. When a character places the saddle on a dragon, the creature is compelled to serve that character as a mount for as long as the saddle remains on its back. Note that the saddle offers no assistance in the epic task of placing it on a dragon's back in the first place. Dragons tend to recognize the magic of the saddle and resist being bound with all their power. Even when a dragon is successfully saddled, the riders control over the dragon is not absolute. While the rider is actually seated in the saddle, the dragon obeys the character's commands to the letter (often, in the case of evil dragons, interpreting those commands as deviously as an efreet interpreting the words of a *wish*). The dragon is prohibited from causing direct or indirect harm to the owner of the saddle and must obey a command to let the character climb into the saddle. Otherwise, the dragon is under no obligation to obey other commands issued when the saddle's owner is not actually mounted. Unlike the subject of a *charm monster* spell, the dragon does not regard the rider as a trusted ally but rather as a cruel tyrant to be overthrown at the earliest possible opportunity.

Furthermore, if a weak-willed or low-level character attempts to command a dragon through the magic of



the saddle, the character runs the risk of instead being dominated by the dragon. This is very similar to the conflict between intelligent swords and weak-willed characters (described in Appendix 3 of the *DUNGEON MASTER Guide*). Where dragons and characters are concerned, compare the dragon's Intelligence plus Hit Dice with the Charisma plus level of the character. If the dragon's personality score is higher than the character's, the dragon may begin to subtly influence the character's actions-or not so subtly, if the difference is 5 or more.

XP Value: 10,000 **GP Value:** 50,000

Skyblight Rod

So desired are these arcane objects by the denizens of the Underdark, that the mere rumor of one being found is enough to incur bloodshed. These rods were fashioned long ago, but none knows their source. The drow claim they are the rod's creators, but the aboleth whisper of earlier magics. Each rod is slightly different, but all are fashioned from dark roots, with smooth black stones clutched in the tough tendrils.

With a *skyblight rod* in hand, a creature that shuns sunlight can walk the surface world during the day without fear. When held aloft and one charge spent, the *skyblight rod* summons ravens from all directions. So many of the black birds are called that the sun is blocked out for a one-mile radius, plunging the area below into dark as black as a moonless night.

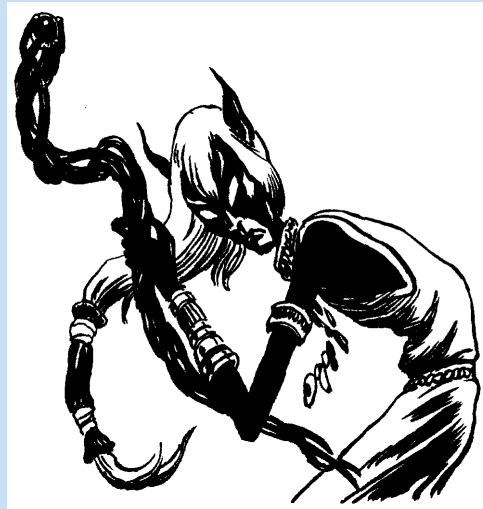
The rod has other abilities. Leveling it at an opponent and expending one charge bestows a curse that causes the foe to suffer a -2 penalty on all saving throws vs. magic. (The effect may be lifted by a *remove curse* spell). Expending two charges causes a *ray of enfeeblement* to strike an opponent, but the weakening effects last until the affected individual is magically healed. Expending five charges draws an arcane symbol in the air above the wielder. Anyone within 200 feet looking in that direction must make a saving throw or suffer extreme terror. 0-level individuals die of fright, while those at 1st-5th level of ability suffer the effects of a *scare* spell. Individuals of 6th-9th level suffer the effects of a *fear* spell. Those of 10th level and higher are hesitant to act against the wielder and lose their action for the round. Even those too distant to suffer

these effects but who can see the rod are chilled by the sight of the symbol.

Against each offensive effect, the target is entitled to a saving throw versus rod, staff, or wand. Good-aligned individuals and creatures cannot wield a *skyblight rod*. They run the risk of being cursed simply by attempting to summon its power; unless they make a successful saving throw vs. rod, they are struck blind permanently (as per the second-level wizard spell) until such time as powerful curative magic (a *heal* or *restoration* spell) has been cast upon them.

This rod may not be recharged. When all the charges have been expended, the black stones crumble to dust, and the roots wither. Some claim that the remains are useful as material components for vile magic.

XP Value: 3,000 **GP Value:** 15,000

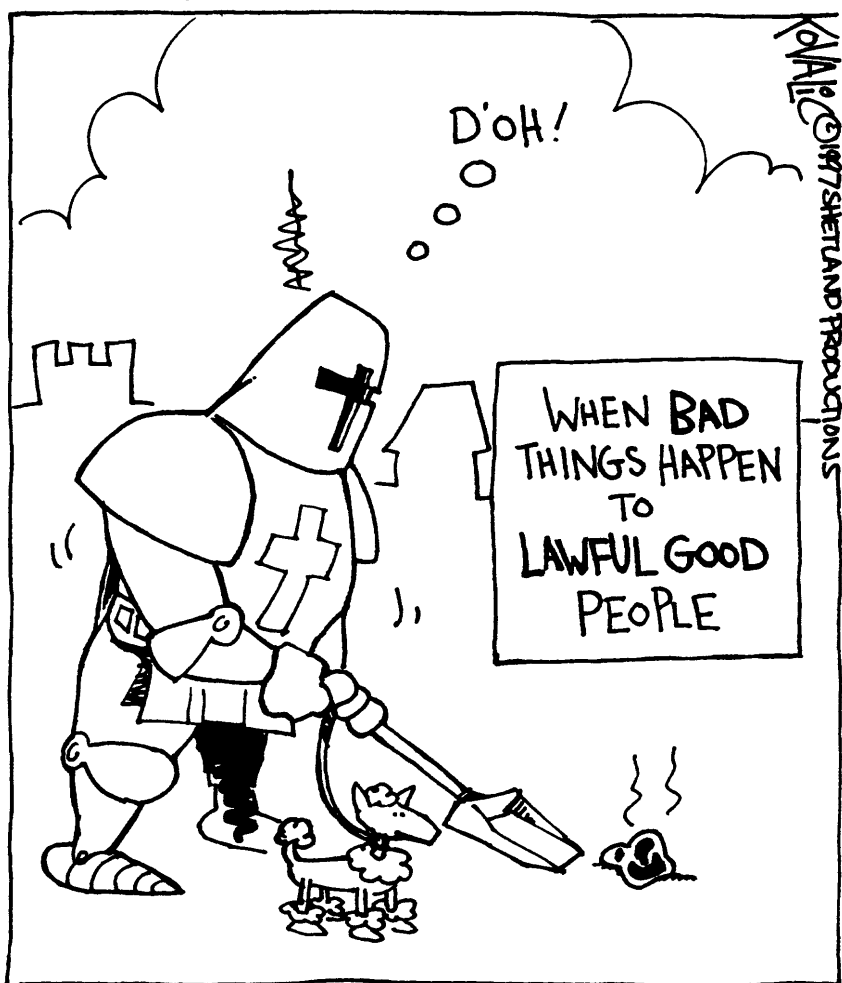


Staff of the Lost Winds

This staff was crafted by a druid who had become so skilled at calling winds that he sought to bind the gusts from the four cardinal directions into

The Unspeakable Oaf

by John Kovalic



a protective device to aid those who traveled the land on foot. The staff appears as a normal, gnarled wooden walking stick except that the top has four evenly spaced knotholes. When the magic is summoned, the knotholes open and release the needed wind.

Priests and wizards may use the *staff of lost winds*. Each use of the staffs powers drains one charge but lasts a full hour. No more than one wind may be summoned at a time. The staff bearer and those within a 20' radius are affected by the winds.

North Wind: The gusts that blow from the staff are cold (about 40 degrees) and protect the bearer and all those within 20 feet from suffering the ill effects of hot climes and weather. The winds restore natural damage caused by heat at the rate of 1 hp per turn. This effect also provides a saving throw bonus of +2 vs. heat- and fire-based attacks and reduces damage sustained by -1 hp per die.

South Wind: These gusts are very warm (about 90 degrees) and protect the bearer and all within 20 feet from suffering the ill effects of cold climes and weather. They restore natural damage caused by cold at the rate of 1 hp per turn. They also provide a saving throw bonus of +2 vs. cold-based attacks and reduce damage sustained by -1 hp per die.

East Wind: These gusts are gentle and comforting. The staff holder and those within 20 feet find themselves refreshed. Any Strength lost due to exertion or magical attacks is regained at a rate of 1 point per turn. While the wind blows, the protected individuals may travel and not become fatigued.

West Wind: These gusts are swift and strong, providing for the staff bearer and those within 20 feet protection from rain and storm. While the wind blows, the protected individuals remain dry and comforted.

An additional power of the staff is that creatures hailing from the

Elemental Plane of Air will see the bearer as a powerful entity and hesitate to attack without strong cause.

The staff may only be recharged at the hands of a high-level druid or air elemental mage. A lengthy ritual with the casting of the *control weather* spell is said to be necessary.

XP Value: 2,500 **GP Value:** 10,000

Whirling Scimitar

The *whirling scimitar* is an enchanted blade usually found in the AL-QADIM® setting, but examples have been found in other lands and even other worlds as well. While it is most commonly found in the form of a scimitar, broadsword and two-handed sword versions have been encountered.

The *whirling scimitar* functions as a +1 magical weapon. Its enchantment increases to +2 when battling flying creatures, and to +3 when used against creatures native to the Elemental Plane of Air. Its unique power, however, is its ability to grant flight to the wielder. If the wielder whirls the scimitar over his head for a full round, forsaking all attacks but retaining all normal defensive ability, the weapon weaves a *fly* spell on the wielder. The character can fly as if under the effect of that spell, with a duration of 5 + 1d6 turns. This ability can be used three times per day.

Note that the character must retain hold of the scimitar for the entire duration of the spell to remain aloft. The scimitar does not need to be whirled after the first round, but if the character drops the weapon while flying the *fly* spell is immediately canceled.

XP Value: 1,500 **GP Value:** 6,000



Having decided that sleep is for the weak, James has plenty of time to juggle a full-time job, lots of writing, and fatherhood. He has a deathly fear of heights.

Steve Berman is a terrible acrophobe. He prefers to maintain a close relationship with the ground at all times. However, his imagination has been known to often take flight.

By Mark Doney



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THE ECOLOGY OF The Sphinx

by Johnathan M. Richards

illustrated by Scott Rosema

THE ROBED FIGURE approached the cave, careful where he placed his feet lest a loose pebble give him away to the great beast that dwelt inside. Even though he had never stepped foot in the vicinity before, he knew the cave like the back of his hand, courtesy of many stealthy visits experienced through the senses of a homonculus.

He stood a moment at the cave's entrance, allowing his vision to adjust to the gloom of the interior, then moved quietly inside. He could hear the soft, rhythmic sound of the creature's breathing just up ahead: good, he was asleep. That would make it all the easier.

Taking a side passage away from the beast, the wizard followed its crooked, meandering way until he was certain he was out of the creature's range of hearing. Ahead was a fork in the tunnel; he knew that if he took the left branch he would find himself in the creature's treasure hoard. He knew, also, that the beast had placed several *glyphs of warding* to protect his treasure, and while it would be child's play to move past the creature's feeble defenses, he preferred his own intricate plan. Why steal from one, when there was treasure from many to be had? The wizard seated himself against the rock wall of the cavern and began the words to his spell.



Great Andrumache snored contentedly, enjoying his midday nap. An androsphinx, he was leonine in build, save for the hawk wings folded upon his back and his bearded human face, currently resting on one cheek in gentle repose upon his front paws. He was much bigger than a lion, reaching a good eight feet tall when standing upon all fours. Like true lions, he lived in a warm climate and chose to spend the hottest part of the afternoon napping in his den.

Currently, Andrumache was enjoying a pleasant dream, reliving a glorious kill when he had swooped down from the sky onto an antelope that had been entirely unaware of his presence. As he tore pieces of flesh from the antelope's haunch, his dream took a sudden turn, changing from a re-enactment of something that had actually happened to something altogether new.

A globe of flame streaked across the sky and landed in a fiery conflagration at Andrumache's feet. The androsphinx could sense the heat of the flames, but he felt no pain. A figure took form, coalescing from the flames to become similar in shape to Andrumache himself, only larger, with wings of fire and a mane of flames circling his ancient face.

"Andrumache," the flame-sphinx belatedly, "You have yet to mate. I know your reluctance, but think upon this: by the cruel dictate of fate, there is only

one female sphinx, the gynosphinx, Yet there are three male sphinxes: the wicked hawk-headed hieracosphinx, the bestial ram-headed criosphinx, and the noble androsphinx.

"Nature decrees that whenever a gynosphinx mates with either a hawk-head or a ram-head, she will bear a male child resembling its father. It is only through the union of androsphinx and gynosphinx that either of these two sphinxes is born. Without such unions, both the androsphinx and gynosphinx would perish from the world, bringing the hieracosphinx and criosphinx to extinction soon afterward.

"The time has come for you to fulfill the duty you owe to your bloodline, Andrumache. Tomorrow, I will send a female to you. Do not disappoint me." The flame-sphinx started to fade from view.

Just as suddenly, it returned. "Oh, and I might just pop in on you myself, Andrumache. Do not look for me in this form, for I shall be wearing another."

Again, it faded from view, and the small fires that had started at its first appearance went out as well, leaving the puzzled Andrumache and his antelope alone in the silence of the dream.



The next day, the robed figure trekked through the woodlands, stopping only to wipe his forehead with a handkerchief and take a long draw from the waterskin at his belt. As he replaced the stopper, he heard a sound from just ahead. *Ah*, he thought, *right on schedule*.

Cresting a small rise, he saw a large, leonine creature pushing dirt with its front paws to cover up a hole.¹ Its features identified it as a sphinx: the lion's body, covered in tawny fur; the powerful, brown hawk-like wings, with feathers shading to a light, creamy tan at the tips. And the creature's head made perfectly clear its exact genotype: It was a criosphinx, with curling, spiral horns jutting from its curly-haired ram's head.² Somehow sensing the robed human's approach, the monstrous sphinx spun around to face him.

1. Criosphinxes live in warm, woodland regions and tend to be wanderers, disdaining permanent lairs. For this reason, they bury their

treasure in the ground, often having several caches spread over a considerable amount of land. They have a remarkable memory in terms

of keeping track of their buried loot, able to head directly to the location of a cache they buried decades before.



"Ah," said the criosphinx. It curled its lips up in a parody of a human smile, exposing numerous sharp teeth, seeming somewhat out of place in its ram's mouth.³

"Hello," began the wizard. "My name is Ulrubio—"

"All the same, I think I'll just call you 'Dinner.' It rather simplifies things, don't you agree?"

"Ah, yes, I see," said the human. "Of course. I seem to remember something about sphinxes being man-eaters. But don't you have to ask me a riddle or something first?"

"I'm sorry," replied the criosphinx. You seem to have your sphinxes mixed up. The female sphinx is interested in riddles; I, as a male, am far more interested in dinner. Which is to say, 'you.' " He took a few steps toward the wizard, padding forward in feline grace, then stopped short. "Unless, of course, you wish to purchase your safe passage?"

"By all means," replied the wizard. "How much do you want?"

"How much do you have?" asked the sphinx pleasantly, the glitter of gold shining behind his eyes.

Well, uh, actually, nothing on me at the moment, just now."

"What a pity," exclaimed the sphinx with a sarcastic sigh, and crouched down, preparing to pounce. "I'll tell you what, though, I'll give you a head start."

The wizard held up his hand to the crouching criosphinx. "Wait! A thought occurs to me!"

The creature relaxed its muscles and stood up to its full height, where it could look down at the robed figure before it. "Yes?" he asked impatiently.

"Perhaps I could direct you to a gynosphinx. Would that buy my life?"

The creature narrowed its eyes and bent its head so that it could look directly at the human. "You know where there's one to be found?"

"Yes, as it happens, I do," replied the wizard. "Only there remains one slight problem . . ."

"Yes?"

"She's been captured by another sphinx. He looks like you, only not quite so big and he has a bird's head."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed the criosphinx. "Not a problem at all!" Suddenly, a thought struck him, and he posed a question. "There's just the one of him?"⁴

"Just the one male, yes, and the one female."

Well then, you're in luck, human. Simply tell me where they can be found, and I'll be on my way."

The wizard gave the sphinx directions to an abandoned temple, half-buried in the desert sands, several hours away by air. As the sphinx stretched its wings for flight, the wizard called out a question of his own.

"How is it that you can speak the language of mankind? I thought you could talk only to others of your kind, and to animals."

"Nonsense! If that were so, how could I bargain with such as yourself?⁵ Now enough, I must be off. You may tell others that you had the unique experience of surviving an encounter with Great Rameses."⁶

As the wizard watched the criosphinx become a distant speck in the distant sky, he smiled to himself and said, "All the same, I think I'll just call you 'Dullard.' It rather simplifies things, don't you think?" Then he cast a spell and teleported away.



The wizard appeared on a hill and found himself in the presence of another sphinx. This one had the feathered head of a hawk to match his wings, and the body of a lion elsewhere. It glared at him, but made no move to attack.

"Well?" asked the wizard. "Have you thought it over?"

"Yes," replied the sphinx.

"And?"

"I agree to your terms. I will be your riding mount, and you will provide me the location of a mate and half of any treasure we earn together."

"Excellent! My name is Malrubio, whom you may address as 'Master.' " He reached inside his robe and pulled out a leather bridle.

"I will do no such thing, nor will I wear that. This is a partnership of equals."⁷

"Indeed. Well, I'll have no need of this, then, will I?" The wizard tossed the bridle on the ground. "You may call me Malrubio, then. And what shall I call you?"

"My name is Warhawk."

"Well, Warhawk, if you won't wear a bridle, perhaps I'll at least be able to talk you into wearing a set of saddlebags. They will be handy in transporting your treasure from its current location to your new home on the lands surrounding my castle estate."

"Agreed."

"Speaking of which, where is your treasure presently kept? I ask only because it might be a day or two before we can transport it, and I'd hate to see it uncovered in your absence."

The sphinx gave a quick look over to its right, to another hill where its nest was located?⁸ "It's safe enough," he responded.

2. A criosphinx is born without horns, but they develop rapidly during its first year of life and then with increasing slowness thereafter. Each year another ridge of new growth appears at the base of the horns, and it takes about 12 years before the horns start to spiral forwards. A criosphinx's horn can be used as an alternate material component for the *shout* spell.

3. While the criosphinx's head is that of a herbivorous ram, it has the appetite of a carnivore and the teeth to match. Its sharp teeth are used to rip chunks of meat from its prey (after which it swallows the pieces whole, but the criosphinx does not use its teeth in combat, preferring instead to rely upon the sharpness and swiftness of its claws and the powerful butting ability of its horned head.

4. Hieracosphinxes are the only type of sphinx which commonly band together in any numbers (they are found in groups of 1-6), preferring the "strength in numbers" strategy when attacking. Both androsphinxes and gynosphinxes prefer a solitary existence, and criosphinxes tend

to remain on their own as well (although occasionally, when searching for a mate, several of the beasts will follow each other, each hoping to take the gynosphinx as his own when, and if, she is ever found). Note that the "No. Appearing" entries in the *MONSTROUS MANUAL* have inadvertently been switched between the gynosphinx and criosphinx; gynosphinxes are encountered singly, while up to four criosphinxes can be found traveling together looking for a mate.

5. It only makes sense that a criosphinx is able to speak the Common tongue, as well as the language of sphinxes and that of the animals, for it has a higher Intelligence rating than a hieracosphinx, 20% of which can speak Common. Also, in the description in the *MONSTROUS MANUAL*™ tome mention is made of it bargaining with other beings, a difficult process were it not able to speak the Common language of the region.

6. It is a common practice for criosphinxes to add a descriptive adjective to their name: hence, Great Rameses, Bold Necrotiki, Swift Ibericus, and so on.

7. It is not unknown for a hieracosphinx to join in partnership with powerful evil beings, but while they're willing to serve as flying steeds, they dislike being treated as if they were mere horses. Furthermore, they are contemptuous of those weaker than themselves and will take advantage of any weakness they see in their "masters." They will remain loyal only as long as they fear their master's power; otherwise, the "master" is likely to end up as the hieracosphinx's next meal.

8. Perhaps because of their partial hawk heritage, hieracosphinxes prefer to lair in nests. Due to their large size, they make their nests on the ground, often at the base of a large tree, or against a large rock outcropping where they are afforded some protection from above. Hieracosphinx nests are simple structures made of broken tree branches, grass, dirt, and occasionally the bones of their prey. The nest serves no purpose other than providing the hieracosphinx with a place to sleep and an area in which to hide its treasure, which is often buried underneath the nest site or simply piled up against the walls of the nest.

"That's all I wanted to know," replied the wizard. "Shall we go?"

"Where to?"

"Why, to find you a mate, of course. I intend to live up to my part of the agreement, after all."



"That's it below," said the wizard.

"I don't see her," replied Warhawk. He circled the structure, gradually spiraling down lower, searching eagerly for any sign of the gynosphinx the wizard said lived there. *If he's lied to me, thought the sphinx, I will chew him in half.*

The temple building lay half buried by an enormous sand dune. It was impossible to judge its size based only upon the part of the structure that was visible.

"Land over there, on the side. We don't want her catching sight of you and escaping. I'll go in and get her to come out, and then you can grab her."

"Why don't I just go in and get her?"

"Because she's on her home ground in there! There's no telling how many traps she has set up, to stop amorous swains like yourself from having their way with her."

"What'd you call me?"

"Just land."

Warhawk did as he was told, and the wizard dismounted. "Now stay here, and keep your eyes open! Be ready to take action, but by all means, don't come inside the building! It's far too dangerous." And with that, the wizard walked up to the ancient structure and entered it.

Again, he was familiar with the place even though this was his first time actually inside; homonculi made excellent spies. He let his eyes adjust to the gloomy interior, then went deeper inside.

The roof of the structure was supported by massive marble pillars. The majority of the building consisted of a single huge, open room, with several smaller rooms in the back. Reclining

on the floor near the back of the room was a gynosphinx. The wizard had a hard time making out details in the dim light, but the voice was unmistakably female.

"Who is there?"

"It is only I, Bellrubios, an explorer and wanderer, a seeker of fabulous treasures."

"Alas, the treasures here have already been claimed by me. You have traveled in vain. Unless there is some service you seek from me?"

The wizard stroked his chin, as if in deep thought.

"A magical item you wish me to scrutinize for you, perhaps?" prompted the sphinx. "A curse you need removed? I assure you, I can offer reasonable rates."

"Actually," replied the wizard, "there is one thing . . ."

"Yes?"

Well, I understand you sphinxes are well-known for your wisdom. Perhaps you could tell me what ails my griffon. He seems to be pining for something, but he refuses to speak of it, and its beginning to affect his performance. Would you be willing to come outside and look him over?"

The gynosphinx's eyes narrowed in suspicion. "Your griffon speaks?" she asked.

"Indeed he does. I'd be happy to introduce you to him." The wizard stepped to the side and extended his hand toward the outer doorway of the half-buried temple.

"No need," replied the sphinx, and growled softly to herself under her breath, activating a *clairvoyance* spell.⁹ Suddenly she sprang to all fours, muscles tensed for action and eyes glaring with anger. "You fool!" she hissed. "That's no griffon—it's a hieracosphinx!"

"Really?" asked the wizard, feigning surprise. "But he swore that he was a griffon. It looks like we've both been duped! What do you think he wants?"

"Idiot! Keep your voice down! He wants me, of course. I should rip your heart out for bringing him here!"

"Really, I don't think that will be necessary. Tell you what, maybe it would be best if we just left." With that, the wizard headed for the entrance, but he stopped at the doorway and looked back into the darkness at the gynosphinx. "I don't see what the problem is, though. You're both sphinxes, aren't you?"

"He is a hieracosphinx! An abomination!"

"Well, what about a sphinx with a head like a ram?"

"They are little better than animals. I would as soon mate with a goat as with a criosphinx."¹⁰

The wizard peered out the doorway, squinting at the open skies of the desert. "Well, here comes one now," he said.

Great Rameses glided down to the desert floor, shrieking a challenge in the language of sphinxes to the hieracosphinx he found guarding the abandoned temple, just as the wizard had said.

"Vile abomination! Begone from here, lest I slit your belly with my keen horns! Flee back to the hills, and leave the gynosphinx to your better!"

"Never!" responded Warhawk. "She was promised to me, and I'll kill any who try to take her from me!" He flexed his wings and prepared to take to the air, where he knew he would have the advantage.¹¹

Great Rameses struck at Warhawk with his head, butting against the hieracosphinx's side with his horns. Warhawk twisted to the side and bit at the criosphinx's shoulder with his sharp beak. The two wrestled back and forth, trading rakes with curved claws until both were bleeding from many wounds. Still they gave no quarter and spouted vile insults at each other between grunts and howls of pain.

"Sparrow!"

"Lamb!"

"You know, I feel just terrible about this," said the wizard, watching the two males in their life-and-death struggle. "Who do you think will win?"

9. Gynosphinxes are able to cast the following spells once per day: *detect magic*, *read magic*, *read languages*, *detect invisibility*, *locate object*, *dispel magic*, *clairaudience*, *clairvoyance*, *remove curse*, *legend lore*, and are able to use each of the symbols once per week. These spells are part of the magic inherent in the gynosphinx, and require no material components or spell books. The same is true of the androsphinx, who is able to cast spells as if he were a 6th-level priest. The androsphinx prefers to use his spells for healing and defense and will almost always draw his spells from the following spheres: All, Animal, Guardian, Healing, and Protection.

10. As far as mating goes, the gynosphinx is restricted to the three types of true male sphinxes: androsphinx, criosphinx, and hieracosphinx. The so-called "dracosphinx" (see the *MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM® Annual, Volume Two*, page 104) is not a true sphinx but is named because its "winged lion" build gives it the appearance of some type of sphinx. Dracosphinxes, however, are hybrid creatures, possibly a magical merging of a red dragon and an androsphinx, but the race has two separate sexes and is mutually infertile with the true sphinxes.

Similarly, the "astrosphinx" (see *MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM 9: Spelljammer Appendix* under

"Sphinx, Astro") is not a true sphinx, either. Several clues include the fact that it's covered in scales, has human hands, and its wings are bat-like instead of feathered. Whatever being created and named these creatures had only a vague understanding of the true sphinxes' physiognomies.

11. Although the smallest of the male sphinxes, the hieracosphinx enjoys the fastest airspeed and maneuverability of any sphinx (Maneuverability Class C, or D if being used as a riding mount). Again, this is no doubt due to the creature's hawk-like nature and build.

The gynosphinx had crept up beside the wizard and watched. "In a one-on-one struggle, the criosphinx usually wins. It is larger and can inflict greater damage with its horns than the hieracosphinx can with its beak."

"Then the criosphinx will win your hand." In the light of the doorway, he got a better look at his companion. She stood a good seven feet tall, with a human face, neck, shoulders, and breasts. The rest of her body was that of a lion, with large wings sprouting from her shoulders. "Uh, I guess paw," he amended.

"Not if I can help it," she said, and moved past him out the doorway. "I can escape while they battle, and hopefully put enough distance from the winner between us for me to remain free."

"But where will you go?" asked the wizard, worry carefully placed in his voice. "Perhaps you could take shelter with Andrumache; he might offer you protection."

"Who is this Andrumache?" asked the gynosphinx suspiciously, keeping a wary eye on the progress of the battle between her two rival suitors.

"He's another sphinx that I know of. Looks kind of like you, but, of course, he's a male."

"An androsphinx?" shrieked the gynosphinx. Could it really be? Tell me where he can be found!"

The wizard gave her precise directions to Andrumache's cave, and she was off like a shot, all but ignored by the other two sphinxes fighting over her. Shaking his head, the wizard headed back into the temple. From his robes he pulled out a *portable hole*. Unfolding it, he reached inside and pulled out his homonculus. Handing the little creature the *hole*, he set him off on his tasks. "It's in the room on the left," he advised. "And mind you, watch out for the *symbols*." As the little creature fluttered off, he called back to it,

"And make sure you get everything! I don't want even a copper left behind this time!" Then he went outside to watch the progress of the battle.



Andrumache paced back and forth in his cave. He enjoyed his solitude and privacy, and he was loathe to give it up. The thought of sharing his cave with a gynosphinx for the years it would take to produce a cub¹² and raise it to maturity sent him into a state of mild panic. Still, the god in his dream was right: as an androsphinx, he had the duty¹³ to perpetuate the race. He might not like it, but those were the facts of life. Without such sacrifices, the great race of the sphinx would soon perish.

A speck in the sky grew closer, and Andrumache could see the form of a gynosphinx take shape. *Tomorrow, I will send a female to you*, the sphinx-god had said. As she came to a landing outside his cave entrance, Andrumache let out a big sigh of resignation. *Maybe the years will pass quickly*, he hoped, and led the female into his cave.



The homonculus dragged the *portable hole* up to his master. "Finished already?" the wizard asked. "All right then, in you go." The construct jumped into the *hole*, and the wizard refolded it and placed it back inside his robes.

He returned his attention to the fighting sphinxes. They were both sorely wounded, yet neither would yield. The insults had stopped, as neither had the breath to waste. The gynosphinx had predicted Warhawk's defeat, though, so maybe he should take some action. With a mental shrug, he cast a series of *magic missiles* into the criosphinx's side. As battered

as the creature already was, that was enough to finish him off, and he plopped to the ground with a wet thud. Warhawk stood panting, catching his breath.

"Let's go," said the wizard, preparing to mount his aerial steed.

"Go?" squawked Warhawk. "I'm not going anywhere but inside to claim what's mine."

"She's not there anymore! Didn't you see her fly off while you two were fighting over her?"

"What? Why didn't you stop her?" demanded Warhawk.

"How? My spells are mainly lethal. I could have killed her, perhaps, but I didn't think that was the desired result. Still, cheer up, I know where she is headed. I, uh, cast a spell of location on her. We can catch her if we hurry."

"Very well," agreed Warhawk. He bent down so the wizard could climb onto his back. "Where is she headed?" he asked as he took to the air.

"To a deserted cave network she knows about. There's only one entrance and exit, so you'll be able to trap her in there."

Warhawk found the strength to fly a little faster.

"Quiet now, or you'll ruin it!" the wizard whispered. "She's in there, on the right, probably fast asleep. Off you go, now." As the hieracosphinx raced off down the tunnel to the right, the wizard shook his homonculus out of the *portable hole* and set him to work once more. "You know the drill," he instructed, then waited for what would happen next.

It wasn't long in coming. He heard Andrumache bellow in outrage, "YOU DARE?" There was a squawk or surprise from Warhawk, and then a vicious roar that sent shivers down the wizard's spine, even as far away as he was.¹⁴ There came a shriek of terror from Warhawk and another bel-

12. Although androsphinxes don't particularly like gynosphinxes—they especially dislike that the females are smarter than they are—they are loyal to them until their offspring is grown. The union of an androsphinx and a gynosphinx results in a single cub of either sex. Regardless of the child's sex, it is raised lovingly by both parents.

On the other hand, when a gynosphinx gives birth to either a hieracosphinx or a criosphinx, the cub is immediately abandoned and left to fend for itself. A gynosphinx will not kill her own offspring, even unwanted ones, but she will do nothing to help it to survive. The father takes over the task of training the young cub to speak, fly, and hunt.

13. Duty is one thing an androsphinx takes seriously. As the guardian of the sphinx race, an

androsphinx will go out of its way to see to the safety of the other sphinx sub-races, even the hated hieracosphinxes, when they are attacked by other creatures. Hieracosphinxes certainly do not share this concern for androsphinxes and will attack an androsphinx if they have sufficient numerical superiority and it appears that they might be able to kill him. They see the androsphinx as an enemy that must be destroyed if at all possible; androsphinxes see the hieracosphinx as a misguided creature that must be led onto the path of goodness by their own example.

14. The roar of an androsphinx is terrible, but the creature must be angry in order to use it. The first roar causes all creatures within 360 yards to

save vs. wands or flee for three turns. If the androsphinx roars a second time, everyone within 200 yards must save vs. petrification or be paralyzed with fright for 1d4 rounds, and those within 30 yards of this louder roar are deafened for 2d6 rounds. Further provocation can elicit a third, even more powerful roar, forcing everyone within 240 yards to save vs. spell or lose 2d4 points of Strength for 2d4 rounds. In addition, all within 30 yards of the androsphinx during its third roar are knocked over and suffer 2d8 hp damage and must save vs. breath weapon to avoid being stunned for 2d6 rounds, unless they are over eight feet tall. Stone within 30 yards of this final roar will crack unless it saves vs. crushing blow.

low from Andrumache, this time even louder. The wizard ran for the cave's entrance. He saw the hieracosphinx dart by in a flash of feathers and take to the air. After peeking down the corridor to ensure that the androsphinx wasn't within sight, he cast a *fireball* spell at the fleeing sphinx before it moved out of range. Warhawk exploded in a puff of orange fire and flames.

There was the click of nails on stone, and the wizard acted quickly, throwing an illusion of flame around his head and creating fiery wings from his back. Andrumache came into view around the curve of the cave tunnel, saw the wizard, and came to a stop. "My lord," he said, bowing his head.

"You have done well, Andrumache," said the wizard. "Now return to your mate, and do what must be done. I am proud of you, my child."

The winged creature bowed again, and returned the way he came. The wizard let out a long breath—that had been close!

The homonculous returned soon after, dragging the *hole*. "Excellent," said the wizard. "You've got the shovel?" The spindly creature stuck its head and arm into the *hole* and pulled out a hand shovel as big as it was. "Then let's go," said the wizard, stuffing the *portable hole* back into his robe. "First you've got the criosphinx's treasure to dig up, then we'll head over to the hieracosphinx's nest and pick up what he's collected. All in all, not a bad day's work." He activated a quick spell, and the robed figure teleported away.

Andrumache and his new mate didn't notice. They had other things on their minds.



Both Johnathan M. Richards and his wife Mary enjoy studying about ancient Egypt and one day hope to see the real Sphinx in person. In the meantime, they often enjoy a good game of Senet, a board game once played by the Pharaohs, which uses throwing sticks

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conventions

FEBRUARY CONVENTIONS

Winter War XXV

February 6-8

IL

The Chancellor Hotel, Champaign, IL. Events: *Magic: Vampire**, AD&D® game, *Call of Cthulhu*: Hero System, *Warhammer*, GURPS*, LARPs, historical games, miniatures, board games, *Star Fleet Battles**, and more. Contact: Donald E. McKinney, 304 W. Sherman Box 1012, St. Joseph, IL 61873. Email: winterwar@prairienet.org.

DunDraCon

February 13-16

CA

Marriott Hotel, San Ramon, CA. Events: 150+ convention-sponsored RPGs, seminars on gaming, CCGs and board game tournaments, miniatures games, SCA rooms with seminars, displays and demos, large dealer room, flea market, figure painting contest, video arcade room and lots of open gaming. Registration: \$30. Contact: DunDraCon, 1145 Talbot Ave., CA 94706. Email: ashland@ccnet.com.

Total Confusion

February 19-22

MA

Ramada Rolling Green Hotel, Andover, MA. Events include roleplaying, board, and card games.

Contact: Total Confusion, P.O. Box 403, N. Clemsford, MA 01863. Email: mikechambers@juno.com.

Con of the North

February 20-22

MN

Radisson Hotel, Downtown St. Paul. Events: collectable card, roleplaying, live-action, computer network, and board games. Contact: P.O. Box 18096, Minneapolis, MN 55418. Email: cotn@omnifarious.org. Website: <http://www.real-time.com/~cotn>.

Jaxcon '98

February 20-22

FL

Ramada Inn on Arlington Blvd., Jackson, FL. Events: roleplaying, card, and miniatures games. Other activities: an AD&D tournament, sanctioned *Magic* tournament, *Vampire* LARP, dealer's room, and flea market. Registration \$20/weekend until Jan. 1; afterward \$25 for weekend, \$15 for Fri/Sat. Contact: Jaxcon, P.O. Box 14218, Jacksonville, FL 32228-4218. Email: Jaxcon@usa.net.

PrezCon

February 26-March 1, 1998

VA

Double Tree Inn, Charlottesville, VA. Events: demos of *Legends of the Five Rings** and *Overpower**; board games including *1830*, *Age of Renaissance**, *Air*

*Baron**, *Axis & Allies**, *Britannia**, *Circus Maximus**, *Diplomacy**, *Hannibal: Carthage vs. Rome**, *History of the World**, *Kingmaker**, *Merchant of Venus**, *Rail Baron**, *Risk**, *Settlers of Catan**, *Titan**, *Samurai Swords**, *UpFront** and *WizWar**; collectible card games such as *Magic: the Gathering**, *Middle Earth: the Wizards**, and *Star Wars**; miniatures including *Battletech** and *Warhammer**. For more information write to PrezCon Inc., P.O. Box 4661, Charlottesville, VA 22905

Winter Fantasy '98

February 26-March 1

IL

Events: RPGA® Network tournaments, LIVING CITY™ events, seminars, board, card, miniature, and non-Network roleplaying. Contact: Winter Fantasy, P.O. Box 13500, Columbus, OH 43213. Email: andon@aol.com.

SheVaCon

February 27-March 1

VA

Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. Guests: C.S. Friedman and Larry Elmore. Events: art show and sale, 24-hour gaming, live-action roleplaying, *Vampire*. Contact: SheVaCon, P.O. Box 2672, Staunton VA 24402. Email: drgnshrd@rica.net

Coscon '98

February 27-March 1

PA

Days Inn Conference Center, Butler, PA. Events: Card, board, miniature, and roleplaying games, including RPGA Network LIVING CITY™ and Benefit events. Other activities: Dealer's area, new game demonstration, computer room, movies, and guests. Registration: \$15 before February 15, \$20 thereafter and at the door. For more information, send a SASE to: Circle of Swords, P.O. Box 2126, Butler, PA 16003.

Convention Listings Policies

This column is a service to our readers worldwide. Anyone may place a free listing for a game convention here, but the following guidelines must be observed.

In order to ensure that all convention listings contain accurate and timely information, all material should be either typed double-spaced or printed legibly on standard manuscript paper. The contents of each listing must be short and succinct.

The information given in the listing must include the following in this order:

1. Convention title and dates held
2. Site and location
3. Guests of honor (if applicable)
4. Special events offered
5. Registration fees or attendance requirements, and
6. Address(es) where additional information and confirmation can be obtained.

Convention flyers, newsletters, and other mass-mailed announcements will not be considered for use in this column; we prefer to see a cover letter with the announcement as well. No call-in listings are accepted. Unless stated otherwise, all dollar values given for U.S. and Canadian conventions are in U.S. currency.

Warning: We are not responsible for incorrect information sent to us by convention staff members. Please check your convention listing carefully! Accurate information is your responsibility.

Copy deadlines are the first Monday of each month, four months prior to the on sale date of an issue. Thus, the copy deadline for the December issue is the first Monday of September. Announcements for all conventions must be mailed to: "Conventions," *DRAGON Magazine*, 1801 Lind Avenue S.W., Renton, WA, 98055, U.S.A.

If a convention listing must be changed because the convention has been canceled, the

dates have changed, or incorrect information has been printed, please contact us immediately. Most questions or changes should be directed to the magazine editors at (425) 204-7226 (U.S.A.).

Important: *DRAGON Magazine* does not publish phone numbers for conventions. Be certain that any address you send us is complete and correct.

To ensure that your convention listing makes it into our files, enclose a self-addressed stamped postcard with your first convention notice; we will return the card to show that it was received. You also might send a second notice one week after mailing the first. Mail your listing as early as possible, and always keep us informed of any changes. Please do not send convention notices by fax, as this method has not proven reliable.

- ✦ Australian convention
- ✧ Canadian convention
- ✧ European convention

MARCH CONVENTIONS

MegaCon '98

March 13-15

FL

Expo Center, Orlando FL. Guests: Julie Bell, John Byrne, Tony Daniel, Joseph M. Linsner, George Perez, Don Rosa, William Tucci, Boris Vallejo, Mark Waid, and Steve Bryant. Events: role-playing, RPGA Network, miniatures gaming, comic book artists, CCGs, anime, LARP, comics, and gaming dealers Room. Other activities: board gaming, fantasy art show and auction. Contact: P.O. Box 3120, Winter Park, FL 32790. Email: megacon98@aol.com. Website: <http://www.edgeglobal.com/megacon>.

Westward-Ho III

March 14

TX

Best Western Hotel, Midland TX. Events: historical, fantasy, science-fiction, miniatures, *Magic: the Gathering*, open gaming, dealers area. For more information write to: Westward-Ho III, P.O. Box 9805, Midland, TX 79708.

Gamer's Con IV

March 20-22

NJ

Four Points Inn, Route 70 East, Cherry Hill, NJ. Events: RPGA Network events, including first-run LIVING CITY and LIVING DEATH™ tournaments, and a LIVING DEATH interactive event. Artist Guest of Honor: Jason Alexander Behnke (L5R/Tempest). Other activities: All new "Lords of Gaming" contests, vendors, artists, auction, demonstrations, computer gaming and more. Registration: \$30 pre-reg; \$40 at door for weekend. All events free. Contact: Heleen Durston, c/o Multigenre, Inc., 2432 Steiner Rd., Lakehurst, NJ 08733-3437. Email: info@multigenre.com or acd@lucent.com. Website: <http://www.multigenre.com>.

Midsouthcon 17

March 20-22

TN

Grand Veranda Hotel, Memphis TN. Events: gaming, panels, dealer's room, video room, masquerade, art show, auction, filking, and more. Registration: \$30 at the door. Contact: Midsouth Science and Fiction Conventions, Inc. P.O. Box 11446, Memphis, TN 38111.

AggieCon XXIX

March 26-29

TX

Texas A&M University. Guests: Robert Asprin, Kerry O'Quinn, Joe R. Lansdale, Thomas Knowles, Darlene Bolesney. Events: dealer's room, art show, panels, gaming, charity auction, *Rocky Horror Picture Show*, masquerade ball, costume contest, 24-hour anime room. Contact: Texas A&M University, MSC Student Programs Box J-1, College Station, TX 77844. Email: aggiecon@msc.tamu.edu. Website: <http://cepheid.tamu.edu/aggiecon>.

Egyptian Campaign '98

March 27-29

IL

Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, IL. Events: RPGA Network events, AD&D game, *Shadowrun**, *Battletech*, *Warhammer 40K*, *Empire Builder*, *Diplomacy*, *Axis & Allies*, *Magic*, *Star Fleet Battles*, *Car Wars**, and many other board, miniature, card, and role-playing games. Contact: Egyptian Campaign 1990, c/o S.I.U.C. Strategic Games Society, Office of Student Development, Third Floor Student Center, Carbondale, IL 62901-4425. Email: ECGamCon@aol.com. Website: <http://www.siu.edu/gamesoc>.

Con-spiracy 8

March 28-29

IL

Grace Roper Lounge at Rockford College, Rockford, IL. Events: roleplaying, card, board, and possibly miniatures games. Registration: \$3 at the door, or free entrance with last year's button. Contact: Theresia Conner, Rockford College, Campus Box 120, 5050 E. State Street, Rockford, IL 61108. Email: connert@rockford.edu.

APRIL CONVENTIONS

Noahcon

April 17-19

OH

Elyria Holiday Inn, Elyria, OH. Over 25 hobby dealers. Events include: WARHAMMER 40K and AD&D tournaments. Contact: Matrix Games and Diversions, 5384 East Lake Road, Sheffield Lake, OH 44054. Email: matrix@centuryinter.net.

Dudley Bug Ball 1998

April 18

✱

Dudley College of Technology, Dudley, West Midlands, UK. From 10:00 A.M. to 11:00 P.M. Tournaments include AD&D West Midlands Open, *Magic: the Gathering*, *Call of Cthulhu*, *Chivalry & Sorcery**, *Traveller**, plus many others. This is a premier independent competitive games convention in the heart of the UK, is sponsored by the Black Country Role Playing Society. Contact: Steve Turner at 94 Laurel Road, Dudley, West Midlands, UK. Email: DudleyBug@aol.com.

MAY CONVENTIONS

AgamemCon

May 22-24

CA

Burbank Airport Hilton and Convention Center, Burbank, CA. Guests: David Eagle, Stephen Furst, Joshua Cox, Jeffery Willerth, Mark Altman, Stephen C. Smith, Richard Herd. Events: dealer's room, parties, art show, masquerade, video room, panels, and more. Contact: Agamemcon, 24161-H Hollyoak, Laguna Hills, CA 92656. Email: orrock@ix.netcom.com.

JUNE CONVENTIONS

Milwaukee Summer Revel

June 5-7

WI

The Inn Towne Hotel, 710 Old World Third Street, Milwaukee. Guests: Gary Gygax, Janet Pack, Tom Wham. Events: All first-run roleplaying events, including LIVING CITY and LIVING JUNGLE™ tournaments, AD&D game, *Call of Cthulhu*, *Boot Hill*, *Paranoia**, board games, miniature events, war games, nonstop Dawn Patrol, TCGs, and the always exciting Wham-A-Thon. Other events: Seminars, dealers area, game demonstrations, and strategic breaks for lunch and dinner. Registration: \$20. Contact: Bruce Rabe, Summer Revel, P.O. Box 779, New Munster, WI 53102.



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Public Service Message

FLOYD

Written
and
Illustrated by
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Roleplaying Reviews

To the Stars!

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HERE'S SOMETHING INTERESTING. I don't claim to see every single RPC product that hits the market, but I see most of 'em. And of all those that showed up in my mailbox the past few months, well over a third could be categorized as science fiction. That's about double the number from the same time last year. Coincidence? Or could it be that because of the proliferation of *Star Trek* episodes (four series = dusk-to-dawn broadcasts) and all the hype in anticipation of the *Star Wars* prequels, publishers know a hot trend when they see one? Beats me. But I know this: for fans of laser beams and bug-eyed monsters, it's a great time to be a roleplayer.



Trinity* game

One 320-page
hardcover book
White Wolf
Game Studio

Design: Andrew Bates, Ken Cliffe,
Richard E. Dansky, Greg Fountain,
Robert Hatch, Chris McDonough,
Mark Rein-Hagen, Richard Thomas,
Stephan Wieck, and Fred Yelk

Editing: Ken Cliffe and Gary Goff

Illustrations: Andrew Bates, Robert
Dixon, Glenn Fabry, Jeff Holt, Mark
Jackson, Leif Jones, Matt Milberger,
Christopher Moeller, William O'Connor,
John Park, David Seeley, Alex
Sheikman, Lawrence Snelly, Brian
Snoddy, Griffon Sykes, Richard
Thomas, and Joshua Gabriel Timbrook

Cover: Richard Thomas

Expectations have been running high for *Trinity* (formerly *Aeon*, before MTV clobbered White Wolf with a lawsuit for trademark infringement). White Wolf revolutionized horror with their World of Darkness RPGs—including the *Vampire: The Masquerade**, *Werewolf: The Apocalypse**, and *Wraith: The Oblivion** games—transforming the genre into a mind-boggling melange of character-rich narrative and grim-as-a-car-wreck Gothic settings. Could White Wolf do the same for science fiction? Well, as it turns out, *Trinity* isn't *Vampire in Outer Space*. It isn't even part of the World of Darkness. And strictly speaking, it isn't science fiction.



\$30

So what is it? It's smart, intense space opera, as vividly imagined as *Vampire* though significantly less bleak. It's what you get when you cross the cyberpunk cynicism of the *Shadowrun** game with the off-kilter politics of the PLANESCAPE® setting and the alien weirdness of the old *Talisanta** game. It's offbeat and one-of-a-kind. And, not incidentally, of all the White Wolf epics to date, it's the easiest to learn and play.

Set in 22nd-century Earth, a planet sandblasted by political turmoil and ecological disasters, *Trinity* focuses on two opposing groups. First, we have the psions, mentally-enhanced humans who've mastered neotics (the science of psionic energy, an elemental force that resonates throughout the universe and unifies all matter). Second, we have the Abberants, a group of sociopathic mutants who were defeated in a apocalyptic war some 60 years ago but who are currently making a comeback. Psions can execute all kinds of neat mental tricks, like reading minds and igniting fires. The Abberants can sprout barbed tentacles and spray acid from the pores of their skin.

Put 'em together, and you've got a classic clash of good vs. evil, and that's basically the engine that drives the game. But because this is a White Wolf production—and because White Wolf takes roleplaying very seriously—players are not only supposed to beat up the bad guys, they're expected to explore weighty philosophical questions. From the introduction: "What is the meaning of life? Why are we here? What is our purpose? Can we define the soul in terms of subquantum psionic particles? . . . the psions could hold the answers." With its superpowered antagonists, *Trinity* is more reminiscent of, say, the *X-Men* than *Star Wars*. But because of the brooding, introspective tone that permeates the text ("As we stand on the brink of discovery, we also stand on the brink of destruction"), these are *X-Men* who probably spend a lot of time on a psychiatrist's couch.

Unlike the morally ambiguous PCs populating the World of Darkness RPGs, *Trinity* PCs are good guys, through and through. (It's possible to play ethically challenged characters, but you'd be violating the tone of the game, and you'd also have to reconfigure the universe.) To generate a PC,

you begin by choosing an avocation (Scholar, Warrior) and personality archetype (Caregiver, Martyr). Next, you prioritize three Attribute categories (Physical, Social, Mental) into primary, secondary, and tertiary ranks. You then receive a fixed number of points to invest in Attributes and their associated Abilities, based on their rank (for example, you get seven points for primary Attributes, five for secondary). Attributes include Perception, Appearance, and Dexterity. Abilities include Athletics, Survival, and Engineering. To round out a PC, you assign him to an organization called an Order (the Aesculapians, the Ministry of Psionic Affairs) that provides him with resources and contacts. You also give him an arsenal of psi powers, which are remarkably similar to magic spells. Typical psi powers include *molding* (stretching one's limbs like Mr. Fantastic), *fursensing* (the ability to see and hear over vast distances), and *heatburn* (which dehydrates living targets). If you don't dwell too long on power selection, you can cook up a versatile, three-dimensional PC in about half an hour.

The mechanics derive from the World of Darkness games, but they've been considerably streamlined. To

adjudicate an action, the gamemaster first determines which Traits—that is, which Abilities, Attributes, and psi powers—are relevant. Each Trait is rated from one to five dots, depending on the skill level of the PC. A 10-sided die is rolled for each dot of the relevant Traits. Every die that comes up between 7 and 10 is considered a success. The more successes, the better the result. If it's a particularly difficult action (say, picking an electronic lock), the gamemaster might require a certain number of successes for completion of the action (three success to pick the lock). Gone are freebie points, knowledge rolls, and other unnecessary complications from the World of Darkness games. It's a slick, clean system, the best yet from White Wolf.

I'd guess that *Trinity* has the potential for an impressive array of adventures, everything from the exploration of unknown planets to alien shoot-'em-ups. I say "guess" because it's impossible to tell for sure based on the sparse amount of campaign material. Sure, we get a "Storytelling" chapter, but it's heavy on generalizations ("Your choice of location for encounters should evolve naturally from the tone you want to evoke in your game") and light on plot hooks. The skimpy locale descriptions—one page for Saturn; barely one page for Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto combined—read like previews of sourcebooks, which will presumably contain a level of detail that the *Trinity* designers were unable (or unwilling) to provide. In the meantime, gamemasters will have to cobble together adventures based on a handful of interesting table scraps: terrorist attacks in Japan (possibly of extraterrestrial origin), eccentric inventions (netlauncher, spider battle harness), and visits from mysterious races (the Qin, meter-long slugs with prehensile tentacles).

Evaluation: With these spell-like psionic powers (*force barrier*, *mind bomb*) and illogical gizmos (aircraft shaped like giant bugs), there's no evidence that any of the *Trinity* design team completed so much as a high school physics course.

Players who take their science seriously would be much better off with the *Traveler** game; in fact, they'd be better off with the *Star Wars** game. What *Trinity* offers is high-IQ roleplaying in a quasi-mystical future, bristling with political intrigue and supernatural

menace. Someday, the White Wolf-ers might turn their attention to genuine science fiction. For now, they've shown they know how to turn out one heck of a fantasy game.



Heavy Gear* game

One 256-page softcover book

Dream Pod 9

\$30

Design: Jean Carrieres, Jeff Fortier, Gene Marcil, Stephane Matis, Martin, Ouellette, Pierre Ouellette, and Marc Vezina with Ghislain Barbe, Elie Charest, and Denis Solaro

Editing: Jean Carrieres, Jimmy Mah, Brian Faughnan, and Laurie Mair

Illustrations and cover: Ghislain Barbe





The Southern Republic

Heavy Gear game supplement

One 128-page softcover book

Dream Pod 9

\$20

Design: Brent Carter, Daren Chicoine, David Cooh, Dave Corriveau, Eric Garvis, Stephane Matis, and James Cotsios, with Tyler Millson-Taylor and Julia Dover

Editing: Marc Vezina, Jean Carrieres, Marc Vezina, and Philippe Boulle

Illustrations: Ghislain Barbe, Normand Bilodeau, Bobbi Burquel, and Charles-Emmanuel Ouellette

Cover: Ghislain Barbe



Jovian Chronicles* game

One 232-page softcover book

Dream Pod 9

\$30

Design: Phillippe Boulle, Jean Carrieres, Wunji Lau and Marc Vezina with Brent Carter, Elie Charest, Laurie Mair, Michael P. O'Shea, and Tyler Millson-Taylor

Editing: Jean Carrieres, Brian Faughnan, Tyler Millson-Taylor, and Julia Dover

Illustrations: Ghislain Barbe, Normand Bilodeau, Bobbi Burquel, Jeff Fortier, and Pierre Ouellette

Cover: Ghislain Barbe



Mechanical Catalog

Jovian Chronicles game supplement

One 136-page softcover book

Dream Pod 9

\$23

Design: Marc Vezina with Phillippe R. Boulle and Tyler Millson-Taylor

Editing: Jean Carrieres, Marc Vezina, and Tyler Millson-Taylor

Illustrations: Ghislain Barbe, Normand Bilodeau, and Bobbi Burquel

Cover: Ghislain Barbe

Here we have two RPCs that share not only the same system but also the same concept. True, the concepts are superficially different. **Heavy Gear** takes place in the year 6132 on Terra Nova, a war-torn human colony in a distant galaxy. **Jovian Chronicles**, set in the 23rd Century, focuses on the colonization of our own solar system, where the planets have become



independent domains competing for resources and power. But both games have roots in tactical wargames and giant robot animation. And both feature mechanized monstrosities who'd be right at home in the **BattleTech*** game-call 'em **BattleTech Life I** and **II**.

Both are beautiful games, into which a lot of effort has been invested. According to the design team, **Heavy Gear** alone required 40,000 sheets of paper, 50 black pens, and 2.5 gigabytes of computer space. Truth to tell, the designers worked so hard on these, I almost feel guilty for not liking them more.

I do, however, like the system, one of the smartest set of universal rules this side of the GURPS* game. Called Silhouette, the system uses 6-sided-dice to generate quick and sensible results. All skills are rated from a low of 0 (little or no aptitude) to 5 (superhuman aptitude). Actions are assigned thresholds of difficulty, ranging from 1 (effortless) to 12 (near-impossible). When a PC attempts an action, the gamemaster assigns a threshold and determines the relevant skill. The player rolls a number of dice equal to the skill level. The results are not added together. Instead, the highest number rolled on an individual die is considered the outcome (if a player rolls two dice and gets a 2 and a 5, the outcome is 5). Every additional 6 adds 1 to the total (if he gets two 6s, the outcome is 7). If all of the dice show 1s, the PC suffers a critical mishap. Actions with higher thresholds, then, become increasingly difficult to achieve. PCs with low skill levels are more likely to fumble than their high-level counterparts. It's a clever, elegant system, a snap to learn and adjudicate.

Character creation is equally smooth, involving the purchase of attributes (Agility, Build, Perception) and skills (Acrobatics, Law, Stealth) from a pool of character points. Simple formulas are used to compute secondary traits (Strength, Stamina, Health). Creating a PC from scratch takes half an hour, tops. My players, however, chose to forego the process altogether, opting instead to choose their characters from the roster of ready-to-go archetypes. The **Heavy Gear** roster includes the Military Instructor, Police Officer, and Test Pilot; **Jovian Chronicles** features the Bounty Hunter, Security Officer, and Young Ace.





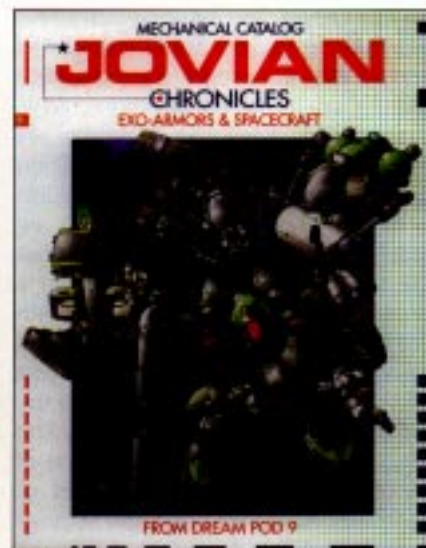
So far, so good. Then we come to the tactical combat rules, and it's like hitting a brick wall. A game-within-a-game, the tactical rules rely on hex maps (not included) and miniatures (not included) to simulate military engagements. But it's more work than fun, what with the eight-step combat round and hard-to-remember mechanics such as "any vehicle that turns more than two hex facings while moving at top speed requires a Piloting Skill roll vs. 3 + terrain MP cost." Though the rules work as intended, they're not compelling enough to make tactical wargamers abandon *BattleTech* or the *Robotech** game.

Sadly, the tactical rules aren't the games' only problem. The settings for these games are downright dismal. *Heavy Gear* purports to tell the tale of the aftermath of the War of the Alliance, when Terra Nova was invaded by Imperial Earth. But there's next to nothing about the history of the war or the effect on the participants. And don't expect much about politics, culture, or economics. Put it this way: the entire "World of Heavy Gear" chapter fills only six pages. The five-page adventure—a pretty good one called "When All Hell Breaks Loose"—fills in a few gaps, but only enough to give a teeny glimpse of the *Heavy Gear* universe. If I were a cynic, I'd say that Dream Pod 9 intentionally downplayed the setting material as an inducement to buy sourcebooks.

But if *Southern Republic* is a representative example, I suggest thinking twice before you get out your wallet. The book examines "the single most powerful nation on Terra Nova," a prosperous military state rife with schemers and crooks. Despite some interesting ideas—a sophisticated taxation bureaucracy; a devious pro-

business organization called the Coalition for Rightful Environmental Exploration—the writing is juiceless, as if the designers had a hard time generating much enthusiasm for the project. For instance, here's an excerpt from the section on crime and punishment: "Convicts toil as restitution for their crimes and serve as a . . . source of menial labor for government projects. These projects range from excavation and construction for more brutal criminals to public service for lesser criminals." Wouldn't you think a sci-fi society would punish criminals more imaginatively than that? The national sport of the Southern Republic is, er, soccer. (Soccer?) The menagerie of Republic creatures includes the Water Viper (yawn) and the Amorous Plant (z-z-z-z . . .).

The *Jovian Chronicles* setting is marginally better, if only because it plays out over a broader canvas. The planets of our solar system, organized as the United Solar Nations, have been struggling to protect their interests from an increasingly hostile Earth. War, of course, erupts. Robotic soldiers with names like HA-101 Brimstone and CEA-05 Wyvern do most of the fighting.



When their robots aren't pounding each other, players may investigate the origins of the Floaters (a race of giant gas-filled jellyfish) or mine hydrocarbons from the frozen seas of Titan. Floaters aside, there's nothing terribly interesting going on here, and the game's ambitions seem awfully modest compared to the wide-screen spectacle of *Trinity*.

Like *Heavy Gear*, *Jovian Chronicles* aims at players more interested in hardware than human beings. If you're among the target audience, you'll find the *Mechanical Catalog* to be nuts-and-bolts nirvana. Rendered in loving detail, the heavily illustrated tome dissects dozens of high-tech vehicles, ranging from missile cruisers and escort carriers to space stations and cargo haulers. With its striking graphics, sharp text, and meticulous blueprints, the *Mechanical Catalog* rivals the best of FASA's *BattleTech Technical Readout* series.

Evaluation: Other than the lifeless settings, I couldn't find anything seriously wrong with *Heavy Gear* or



Jovian Chronicles. But I couldn't find much to be excited about either. As I fiddled with the robots, my mind kept drifting, conjuring up questions. Why, I wondered, didn't the designers set both games in the same era? (Then the PCs could shift back and forth between games, which would be pretty cool.) Why didn't they strip out the tactical rules and put them in a separate game? (FASA did this with *BattleTech* and the *MechWarrior**, in recognition of the fact that roleplayers and miniatures enthusiasts are, for the most part, two separate species.) And why oh why didn't they use some of those black pens and gigabytes of computer power to make the settings less derivative? A system this good deserves a setting with a little more pizzazz, something like . . . oh, I don't know . . . like **Reign of Steel** maybe? (Information: Dream Pod 9, 5000 Iberville, Suite 332, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, H2H 2S6.)



Reign of Steel

GURPS game supplement

One 128-page softcover book
Steve Jackson Games



\$18

Design: David Pulver

Editing: Susan Pinsonneault

Illustrations: Dan Smith

Cover: John Zeleznik

Every now and then, a sourcebook comes along that not only knocks my socks off but also massages my feet and trims my toenails. David Pulver has been responsible for more than a few sock-knockers, including *GURPS Mecha*, West End's *Indiana Jones and*

the *Rising Sun*, and TSR's *Glory of Rome*. But he's outdone himself with **Reign of Steel**, a start-to-finish dazzler that ranks as one of roleplaying's best-ever science fiction settings.

It's a simple premise. In the 21st century, robots have taken over, treating humans with the respect normally accorded to cold sores. Most humans have been wiped out; the rest hide in grimy slums or await execution in labor camps. Small bands of guerrillas—most likely, you and your fellow PCs—are all that stands between the robots and the total extermination of mankind. Pulver milks the premise for all it's worth, painting a vivid picture of a future that's both unrelentingly grim and infectiously exciting.

The world has been divided up into 18 sovereign territories called Zones, each of which is controlled by a single Artificial Intelligence computer/robot (or "zonemind"). The first half of the book describes the zones, any of which could serve as a springboard for a first-class campaign. In Zone Denver, the zonemind is replacing its damaged circuitry with brain tissue, supplied by involuntary donors. In Zone Vancouver, traitorous humans called zonegangs lure unwary travelers into deadly ambushes; the local zonemind pays \$50 for each human head. And in Zone Berlin, the zonemind has unleashed swarms of cybernetic mosquitoes to torment human victims with injections of nerve gas.

Throughout, the text sparkles with invention. A rogue robot disguised as a semi truck roams the interstates of North America to rescue the distressed and dispossessed, making it the oddest superhero ever to grace the pages of an RPC. In the jungles of South America, robot scientists tinker with a new lifeform called the "Green Man" that's half android, half plant. Thinking about a dip in the ocean? Watch out for the cyberwhales.

Engaging sections on robot installations (slave camps, military citadels) and wilderness hazards (radioactive waste dumps, mutant animals) precede a too-brief (11 pages) campaign chapter, mostly a collection of scenario outlines. I would've preferred a fully developed adventure, but those are hard to come by in *GURPS* books. Thankfully, the outlines are absolute corkers, packed with exciting twists (what happens when-gulp-the robots decide to colonize outer space?). And for a change of

pace, you can experiment with robot PCs. (Die, human scum!)

Evaluation: Although intended for the *GURPS* game, **Reign of Steel** contains a dead minimum of statistics, making it easy to adapt to other systems. (If you're a *GURPS* player, however, I suggest you round up *GURPS Robots* and *GURPS High Tech*, both by Pulver, which will increase your enjoyment of **Reign of Steel** exponentially.) **Reign of Steel** takes players on a riveting journey through an unforgettable setting, loaded with laughs, thrills, and endless surprises. Roleplaying doesn't get any better.

Short and Sweet

Champions: Alliances, by Eric Burnham, Steven S. Long, Steve Peterson, and Bruce Harlick. R. Talsorian Games, \$14.

Alliances details five campaign-ready organizations for the *Champions: New Millennium** game, complete with historical summaries and facility descriptions, along with a number of brief but intriguing adventure hooks. Among the entries: the Arcadian Academy (a superhero training school), the Guard (a paramilitary outfit sponsored by the Defense Department), and the Odyssey Research Institute (specializing in robots and time machines). How well you like **Alliances** depends on the kind of comic books you favor. If you're a light-'n'-easy *Legion of Super Heroes* kinda guy, **Alliances** is right up your alley. But if you're the grim-'n'-gritty Image Comics type, this'll seem about as interesting as a compendium of daycare centers.

Mediums: Speakers with the Dead, by Justin Achilli, Andrew Bates, Roger Gaudreau, Ed Hall, Robert Martin, James A. Moore, Ronni Radner, Tracy Rysavy, Lisa and John Daigle, and Fred Yelk. White Wolf Game Studios, \$15.

Guildbook: Pardoners and Puppeteers, by Elizabeth Ditchburn, Heather Grove, Jackie Cassada, and Nicky Rea. White Wolf Game Studios, \$18.

Wraith: The Oblivion has the potential to be the creepiest of the World of Darkness RPGs, what with all its angst-ridden undead and dreamstalking sadists (the latter detailed in the terrific *Guildbook: Sandmen*.) But the more the game strays from its inhuman central cast, the more mundane it becomes. Case in point: **Mediums**, a look at mortals with the ability to communicate

Re: Views

Date: Thu, 23 Oct 97 22: 14:00 PDT

From: lester smith <lester@pensys.com>

To: DRAGON Magazine <dragon@wizards.com>

The Power* Game

256-page, perfect-bound book

Nexus Transmedia Corp. \$24.99

1 Scarsdale Rd., Don Mills ON

Canada M3B 2R2

Website: <http://www.thepowerrpg.com>

Design: Quentin Blasingame & Fulvio Ciano, with James Gadbois, Steven Leve, and Hugh Adam Simpson

Editing: Lesley Milner

Cover Art: Sheri Bowers

Interior Art: Sheri Bowers, David Komlos, Adam Smith, and Brian Theriault

Imagine that what we perceive as reality is merely the skim atop a sea of dreams. Deep within the depths of this "DreamTime," there dwell vast intelligences with their own agendas. Sometimes they contact dreaming humans, awakening psychic powers within them. These "Mentors" then set those contacted to tasks, willing or not. Meanwhile, secret government bureaus and clandestine corporations seek to capture these new "DreamBenders" for their own ends. Naturally, conflicts arise-between Mentors and their 'Benders, between psychic agencies and 'Benders, even between 'Benders and 'Benders. This is the world of *The Power* RPG: a modern mix of paranoid conspiracy theory, mystical archetypes, and near magical abilities.

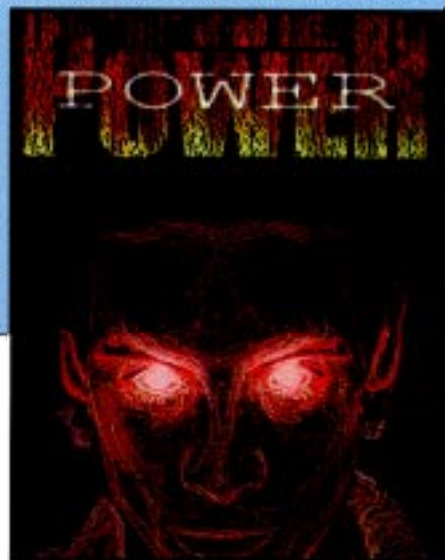
Characters in the game can come from any walk of life, but all are able to use psychic powers to some degree. Through "Boosting," they can psychically increase their natural attributes for a limited period of time, allowing for great feats of strength, reasoning, and so on. Through

"Bending," they can psychically extend their natural abilities through the DreamTime itself, to lift objects in the real world at a distance, read minds, and the like. But with this power comes trouble: the jealous attention of a Mentor, the risk of mutation from excessive psychic activity, and the opposition of 'Benders with other agendas. The setting is fascinating, full of adventure potential.

Graphically, the game book is well executed, with a strong layout, excellent black-and-white art, and some wonderful color paintings by Sheri Bowers. The product begins and ends with several pages of comic book story, setting the mood for the text that resides between.

Textually, the game is something of a mixed bag, though. On the one hand, the world is presented convincingly and entertainingly. The psychic powers follow a consistent internal logic, for example. There are plenty of fascinating example Mentors and their "Advocate" groups, with convincing histories of their own. And the sample adventure provides a great example of the type of plots possible and works well as a starting point for new player personas.

The game mechanics are respectable, but somewhat lacking in polish. While the character creation system works well, the task system is prone to erratic results: a three-tiered set of ability ratings together create a target number for a d20 roll, which tends to be far too random for smoothness of play. I suspect that the designers expect game masters to "fudge" for the purposes of story, in keeping with the current trend of RPGs to treat game



mechanics as a poor, red-headed step-child. The writing betrays this orientation, as well. Whenever the designers speak of the world, their text is exciting and evocative. When they speak of game mechanics, it is awkward, confusing, and hesitant, resulting in a muddy mix of rules options and warnings not to abuse the system. (Don't think of a monkey.) Unfortunately, the book presents mechanics early and world detail late, making for something of a wade to get to the good parts.

Still, taken as a whole, *The Power* is a literate, entertaining read and a new take on some old themes. The central concept is big enough both to provide plenty of adventure possibilities on its own, and to incorporate pretty much any modern mysteries the game master might care to exploit. The range of possible player characters is open-ended, as well. For example, our playtest group consisted of a street punk, an urban landscaper, and an elderly librarian confined to a wheelchair, all created with equal ease, and all equally playable.

I'm highly impressed with *The Power* RPG, and I think you will be too.



with the dearly departed. The book covers Tarot readings, fortune tellers, even televangelism. It's well-written but incidental to the essence of *Wraith*. Better by far is *Pardoners and Puppeteers*, which spotlights a pair of mysterious Guilds: the bad guy Puppeteers (renegade body jumpers, outcasts of Stygia) and the good guy Pardoners (enemies of darkness, healers of the dead). There's plenty of useful campaign material, including several

new artifacts (soul lantern, hoodoo doll) and merits (storm warning, friends in high places). But what lingers in the mind are the characters: angst junkies, sin eaters, serial killer skin-riders. Creepy stuff. And when it comes to *Wraith*, the creepier, the better.

Star Wars Adventure Journal, edited by Peter Schweighofer. West End Games, \$12 per copy, \$35 for four-issue subscription.

In its fourth year of publication, the *Adventure Journal* continues to provide essential reading for *Star Wars* enthusiasts. Part magazine, part RPG supplement, issue #14 includes Barbara Hambly's short story "Murder in Slushtime," profiles of five new aliens, and *Star Wars* stats for a warehouse full of droids. Nothing earth-shattering here, just solid entertainment. And at \$12 for nearly 300 pages, it's a bargain to boot.

Zero* game, by Lester Smith. Archangel Entertainment, \$25.

In this disturbing, oddball RPG, players take the roles of Borg-like biomechs, individual units of a collective consciousness under the thumb of the nasty Queen Zero. The game begins by liberating the PC biomechs from the Queen, then sending them into an inhospitable universe. Little by little, the PCs acquire a sense of their own individuality, all the while eluding the clutches of the Queen, who is none too happy to have them running around loose. **Zero** boasts a fascinating premise and clutter-free, easy-to-master mechanics, but it comes up short on background material. After my group completed the introductory adventure, we were at a loss as to what to do next. Guess we're gonna have to sigh-wait for the supplements. (Information: Archangel Entertainment, P.O. Box 481, Lake Geneva, WI 53147)

Film Festival #1, by Gareth-Michael Skarka, John R. Phythyon Jr., David Brandon Sturm, Matt Harrop, and Aaron Rosenberg. Event Horizon, \$15.

To Live and Die in HK, by Gareth-Michael Skarka, John R. Phythyon Jr.,

David Brandon Sturm, Matt Harrop, and F.S. Kessler. Event Horizon, \$18.

If I were to list the best new RPGs of 1997, the *Hong Kong Action Theatre** game would be near the top, a brainy simulation of Asian cinema that's more fun than the films it emulates.

Film Festival #1 presents 15 top-notch adventures, five in each of the game's three genres (Gunplay, Marital Arts, Bizarre Fantasy). Favorites: "Five Fists of Kung Fu" (bloody revenge against the tyrannical Ching Dynasty) and "Magic Hunter" (featuring the Monkey King and his supernatural minions).

To Live and Die in HK offers a plethora of new specialties, spells, and maneuvers. Unlike many rules expansions, this one adds nuance and flavor without significantly increasing the complexity. Add six exciting mini-adventures, you've got an essential purchase. (Information: Event Horizon, P.O. Box 1149, Lawrence, KS 66044.)

Stuper Powers* game, by Ryan Dunlavey, Steve Ellis, Jamal Igle, Carson Jones, Stew Noack, Lauren Rabinowitz, Fred Van Lente, and Alan H. Zatkow. Unstoppable Productions, \$5.

First off, I don't care what the cover says, this isn't a real RPG. Rather, it's a

parody of an RPG, a 32-page joke-book targeted at the Beavis and Butt-head crowd (which includes yours truly): To begin, you stop off at Bud's Live Bait and Wargaming Emporium and pick up a Flounder Force Secret Decoder Ring and a bag of 50-sided dice. You create a stuper hero by determining his Cape Length, Adjusted Gross Income, and Tights Size. Stuper abilities include Entangle With Armpit Hair, Urine of Invisibility, and Summon Breasts. So does **Stuper Powers** deliver five bucks worth of laughs? Hey, I'd say Summon Breasts is worth a buck or two all by itself. (Information: Unstoppable Productions, 262 Fifth Ave., Second Floor, Brooklyn, NY 11215.)

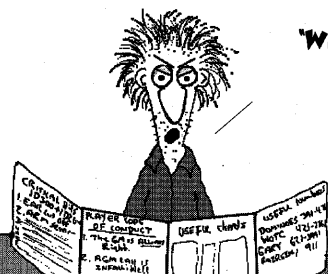


Iowa freelancer and alien enthusiast Rick Swan would like to say hi to all his bald-headed buddies in Roswell, New Mexico.

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OKAY, AS YOU GUYS ARE SITTING IN THE BAR QUAFFING ROUNDS OF ALE, A **LARGE BURLY DWARF** SUDDENLY STRUTS THROUGH THE DOOR. HE'S AN **INCREDIBLE FIGURE**, WITH **HUGE RIPPLING MUSCLES** AND A SET OF **PIERCING EYES**. FOR A MOMENT HE JUST STANDS THERE AS HE LOOKS AROUND THE BAR. FINALLY, WITH A **LOOK OF DISGUST** HE BELLOWS OUT, **'WHO'S THE TOUGHEST MATE IN THIS HERE BAR?'**



WHAT THE HELL IS THIS GUY'S PROBLEM? HUH?

SOUNDS LIKE HE NEEDS A LITTLE **ATTITUDE ADJUSTMENT** TO ME. AND I'M JUST THE GUY TO GIVE IT TO HIM.

THE DWARF LOOKS AROUND AND SHRUGS HIS SHOULDERS. **'WELL?'** HE SAYS, **'WHO'S THE TOUGHEST?'**

CAREFUL! HE REALLY SEEMS CONFIDENT, GUYS!

TOUGHEST GUY IN THE BAR? HE'S OBVIOUSLY TALKING TO ME!



TEFLON BILLY STANDS UP PROUDLY AND ANSWERS, **'WELL, LITTLE MAN, IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR THE TOUGHEST DUDE IN THIS BAR, THAT WOULD BE ME!'**

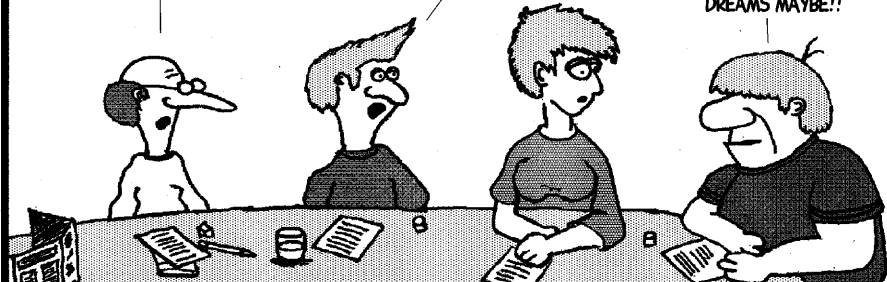
OF COURSE, I'M GIVING HIM MY BEST **POKER FACE** AS I SAY THAT. (-4 TO HIS SAVE VS. INTIMIDATION ROLL.)

WHOOOOAAAAHHH! HOLD ON THERE **MISTER NUMBDICE!!** WHO DECIDED **YOU** WERE THE **TOUGHEST?**

BOB'S RIGHT! WE ALL KNOW THAT **EL RAVAGER** IS THE **BEST BRAWLER** IN THE PARTY! BETTER LEAVE THIS TO ME!

JUST IGNORE THE OAF. IT'S OBVIOUS HE'S JUST LOOKING FOR TROUBLE.

EL RAVAGER? HAAA! IN YER DREAMS MAYBE!!



YOU'RE BOTH WHACKED! EVERYONE KNOWS THAT **KNUCKLES THE THIEF** IS THE TOUGHEST.

KNUCKLES? ARE YOU JOKING?! ARE YOU FORGETTING THE TIME THE **TORCH BEARER** COLD-COOKED YOU AND SENT YOU TO **LA-LA LAND?**

GUYS ... PLEASE ...

OR HOW ABOUT THE TIME THAT **GNOME BLACKSMITH** MADE YOU EAT THAT **COW PATTY?**

I THOUGHT WE AGREED NOT TO BRING THAT UP AGAIN! HUH? THAT **TORCH BEARER** **SUCKER-PUNCHED** ME WHEN I WASN'T LOOKING! AND THAT **GNOME** DIDN'T MAKE ME EAT THAT **COW PATTY!** HE TRICKED ME! HE TOLD ME IT WAS AN **HERBAL MUFFIN!** HOW WAS I SUPPOSED TO KNOW?!

WELL, I'M JUST SAYING! THAT'S ALL!!



THIRTY MINUTES LATER

WHADDA YA MEAN **TEFLON BILLY** SAVED OUR BUTTS FROM THAT **SWACK IRON DRAGON?** TAKE A REALITY PILL, **DUDE!!** IT WAS **KNUCKLES** WHO DELIVERED THE **KILLING BLOW!**

NA NA, YOU'RE BOTH FULL OF IT! IT WAS **EL RAVAGER** WHO SMOKED THAT **DRAGON'S BUTT** WITH MY **HACKMASTER** -12!

OH, AND I SUPPOSE MY **FIREBALL BARRAGE** HAD NO IMPACT WHATSOEVER! **GET REAL!!!**

I ALWAYS USE THE **'BELLIGERENT DWARF'** TRICK WHEN EVER I SHOW UP ON **GAME NIGHT** WITH **NO ADVENTURE PREPARED.**



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DRAGON® Magazine #245

Dwarves

Cover by Matt Wilson

This issue is devoted to those industrious denizens of the underdark, the dwarves. Discover new kits, spells, magical items, and other great game information to add to your own AD&D campaign.

❖ Heart of the Forge

By Wolfgang Baur

The secrets of dwarven craftsmanship are revealed at last, with new skills and proficiencies, plus the mysteries of the hammer chants.

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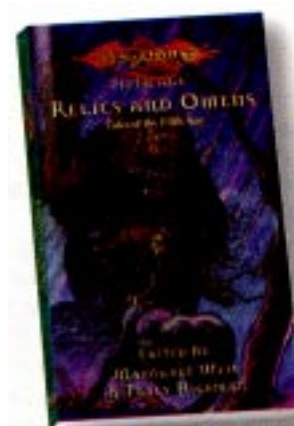
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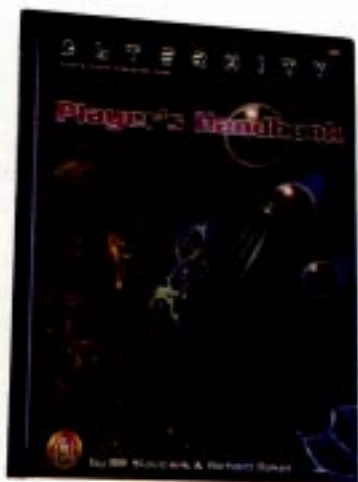
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Ed Greenwood

The creator of the FORGOTTEN REALMS® campaign setting has run the same AD&D® campaign with the same core group since 1978.

Profiles

by Allen Varney

WHEN ASKED A FEW QUESTIONS for this 700-word *DRAGON® Magazine* profile, Ed Greenwood sent responses totalling 2,600 words. This enthusiasm marks all the work by the prolific creator of TSR's most popular campaign setting, the FORGOTTEN REALMS.

Greenwood's spectacular elaboration of the Realms, which resembles Heinrich Schliemann's obsessive 1870s excavation of ancient Troy, started with stories he wrote as a young boy in the upscale Toronto suburb of Don Mills. The "Forgotten Realms" name originally came from the notion of a "multiverse" of parallel worlds. Our Earth is one, the Realms another. In Greenwood's original conception, Earth's fantastic legends derive from a fantasy world that we've now lost the way to—hence, the Forgotten Realms. "Concerns over possible lawsuits (kids getting hurt while trying to 'find a gate') led TSR to de-emphasize this meaning," he says.

Discovering the D&D® game in 1975, Greenwood really bought into roleplaying with the first AD&D® game releases (1978). He started a Realms campaign in Waterdeep—he still plays with the same group today, albeit sporadically—then started another group known as the Knights of Myth Drannor in Shadowdale. His players' thirst for detail made the Realms what it is: "They want it to seem real, and work on 'honest jobs' and personal activities, until the whole thing grows into far more than a casual campaign. Roleplaying always governs over rules, and the adventures seem to develop themselves."

Starting in 1979, Greenwood began writing many *DRAGON Magazine* articles that included Realmslore. Upon deciding to do AD&D 2nd Edition, TSR sought a ready-made campaign setting, more open-ended than the epic *DRAGONLANCE®* setting. Staff designer Jeff Grubb asked Greenwood, "Do you just make this stuff up as you go, or do you really have a huge campaign world?" Greenwood recalls, "I answered 'yes' to both questions."

Sending TSR a few dozen cardboard boxes stuffed with pencil notes and maps, he sold all rights to the Realms for a token fee. "It didn't make me rich (no, I don't own part of TSR, control the Realms, or get royalties on all Realms products), but I've never regretted it for a moment. It has

allowed me to travel the world to meet gamers, make a lot of good friends, and share my creation with interested gamers everywhere. In turn, they've detailed bits of the setting that I hadn't, and have given me something precious: the ability for 'my' Realms to surprise me."

Greenwood, 38, is currently working on TSR's ninth *DOUBLE DIAMOND TRIANGLE SAGA™* novel (*The Diamond*, with Rob King); the third Elminster novel, *The Temptation of Elminster*; several Realms short stories; the Ravens Bluff sourcebook, an RPGA® Network project; columns for *DRAGON® Magazine* and *POLYHEDRON®* Newszine; convention adventures; and Realmslore answers for fans. He lives in apple-growing country on Lake Ontario; he still works full time at the North York Community Library, as he has since 1974; and he still has 60 boxes of Realmslore in his basement.

Some more of those 2,600 words:

"Of my Realms work, I like best those products that impart some of the richness and color of the Realms, such as the novel I wrote with Jeff Grubb, *Cormyr*; the *Volo's Guides*; *Seven Sisters*; *The Code of the Harpers*; *City of Splendors*; and stuff that lots of gamers have found useful, such as *Drow of the Underdark* and *Ruins of Undermountain*. I love many areas in the Realms, but Waterdeep, Cormyr, and the Dales are my personal favorites thus far.

"Keeping my enthusiasm for the Realms over the years has been easy. So many new friends care about it, ask me constant lore questions, and share what they've done. My most memorable fan experiences include meeting complete strangers in European game shops who wanted to drop everything to give me personal tours of their cities, being asked to name babies, and even (gulp!) being asked to father babies. (I'm happily married, and declined; 'twas flattering, though!)

"I love the Realms, I designed it to last forever, and although I'll be sad when favorite characters die and things change, I intend to go right on loving it, for as long as I'm alive. Life is a journey, not an episode or two . . . and so is the Realms."

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